

COUNT  
**L. N. TOLSTOY**  
HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY  
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## PREFACE

To write a biography of Tolstoy—that is to say, to write the life of a man who for half a century has been the most conspicuous literary figure of his country, and whose name has been identified with every burning question of our time—is a task which may well make any biographer pause and ponder, and wonder whether he is qualified for it. I may at least claim this qualification for the work I am attempting—that for many years I have been in intimate sympathy and in close touch with my subject. As a student I learned the Russian language mainly to read the works of Tolstoy. In later years I travelled to Russia, and went on a pilgrimage to Yasnaya Polyana, mainly to get into per-

sonal relations with the Master. Since then I have repeatedly received singular marks of Tolstoy's interest and confidence, which I shall always treasure as unforgettable memories. Some years ago, Dr. Makoviczy, Tolstoy's medical adviser and secretary, who accompanied him on his last tragic journey, wrote to me, at the request of Tolstoy, asking me to forward him an essay of mine on the "Russian Revolution." He had seen it in a Croatian translation and had read it to the Master, who had expressed a desire to read it in the original, and who declared himself to be in complete agreement and sympathy with my views on the Russian situation. Two years later Mr. Serguenko, the well-known writer, sent me a request to contribute a chapter to the International memorial volume published on the occasion of Tolstoy's eightieth birthday, informing me that he did so at the desire of Tolstoy himself, who had submitted my name. I am sorely afraid

that the confidence of the Master was sadly misplaced, and I only mention the fact in order to explain that but for Tolstoy's confidence and explicit suggestion this book would never have been written.

The main ideas of this volume are contained in an essay which appeared in the Russian memorial volume, and which was rewritten in English for the *Contemporary Review*, and for a Dutch magazine, *Watenschappelyke Bladen*.

It is hardly necessary for me to say how deeply I am—as, indeed, all those interested in Tolstoy must needs be—indebted to the monumental “Biography” of Mr. Aylmer Maude, and to the invaluable compilation of Mr. Birukof, as well as to the “Memoirs” of Fet, the “Recollections” of Behrs and Anna Seuron, the Russian “Studies” of Professor Miller, of Gromeko, of Strahof, of Serguenko, and of Merejkovsky. The German “Essays” of Professor Brückner and Zabel, the epoch-making volume of De Vogüé, and the

“Essays” of Hennequin, Dupuy, and Romain Rolland are also sources which no student of Tolstoy can afford to ignore.

But the chief documents to be utilized are the Master’s own words and works. The biographer has already at his disposal an enormous mass of autobiographical material in the form of diaries, confessions, private correspondence. I have taken full advantage of this source of information. It would indeed have been impertinent to obtrude my own second-hand narrative wherever it was possible to let Tolstoy tell his own story in his own words. Wherever no contrary indication is given, I have utilized the excellent translations of Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer Maude.

This biography is mainly literary in character ; but in the case of Tolstoy politics and religion are so intimately bound up with literature, that they must needs have received an amount of space which in the case of any other writer would have seemed disproportionate.

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## INTRODUCTION

### TOLSTOY'S PLACE IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

THE twentieth century will be the century of the Russian. Before it will have run its course one-fourth of the inhabitable earth, from the frontiers of Germany to the frontiers of China, from the ice-bound shores of the White Sea to the sub-tropical ridges of the Himalaya, will be occupied by a homogeneous population of three hundred millions of people—the most formidable aggregate of civilized humanity known to history. Already the two extremes of this huge empire are connected from the Baltic to the Pacific by a continuous line of communication—the most colossal railway of our planet.

No race has had a more tragic past, and no race seems destined to a more brilliant future. For centuries the Russians have been the bulwark of Christendom against the Tartars, and they have only been delivered from the Asiatic hordes to become a prey to domestic tyranny. They are periodically subjected to the stern discipline of famine, and they are always subjected to the discipline of a merciless climate ; and this discipline has eliminated the weak and has made the strong stronger. At last, after a thousand years, the strong are coming into their inheritance.

The slow, steady advance of Russia is one of the most impressive phenomena of history ; and when the vision of mankind will be directed to the future, as to-day it is directed to the past, the schoolboy will one day be taught the epic of Russian expansion, as to-day he is taught the epic of Imperial Rome. The great historian of the French monarchy, Saint-Simon, tells us that less than two cen-

turies ago the founder of the Russian Empire humbly begged to be received at the Court of Versailles, and that he begged in vain. Louis XIV. did not condescend to entertain the barbarous chieftain of a semi-Asiatic people. To-day the successors of Louis XIV. in their turn are begging for the friendship of the successors of Peter the Great, and the savings of the French peasants are employed in hundreds of millions in developing the country of the moujik. At times the Russian Government may suffer a temporary check; but nothing can arrest the development of the Russian people. It is true that any evil that befalls them necessarily assumes the colossal proportions which everything takes in the empire of the Tsars; but it is generally found that the catastrophe, however much it may strike our imagination, does not leave any permanent traces, and cannot stop the growth of the giant. War and famine, plague and disease notwithstanding, every year two

millions of souls—that is, one-half of the population of Scotland—are added to the Russian Empire. Every year thousands of square miles are opened to agriculture and industry. In the year of grace 1905 the writer of these pages was visiting Russia from north to south, and from east to west, and found it engaged in a life-and-death struggle. The whole political and social system seemed threatened with dissolution. Five years after, he revisited the scene of the tremendous cataclysm, and already the giant had recuperated from his wounds. Notwithstanding the continuance of many scandalous abuses, he found the Imperial Exchequer replenished, industry and commerce thriving, and everywhere the signs of abounding prosperity.

Nor has the advance of Russia been restricted to her economic and political activities. Moral and intellectual progress has been no less enormous. Fifty years ago ninety-nine per cent. of the people were still

steeped in gross ignorance ; ninety per cent. were still living in a state of serfdom. The ukase of Alexander II. accomplished with a stroke of the pen what it took Western nations a thousand years of Christianity and of revolution to achieve. To-day, less than two generations after the emancipation, Russia is taking a leading part in many of the arts of peace, in many of the higher activities of man. She has given a Verestchagine to painting, a Mendelieff to science, a Tchaikovsky to music, a Solovioff to philosophy ; and above all, she has given to literature an immortal band of masters of language, who have brought us a fresh revelation of beauty and a new interpretation of life.

It will be the object of the following chapters to deal with one of those supreme masters of language. Tolstoy is not only the greatest of Russian writers, he is also the most typical, the most representative. As Shakespeare is the spokesman of the English



people, as Dante and Goethe are the voices of the Italian and German nations, so Tolstoy is the voice of one hundred and fifty inarticulate millions of the Russian people. Better than any other Russian author he enables us to understand the Russian spirit and the Russian temper. He makes us realize the special gifts which Russian literature has contributed to the world.

This is not the place to examine the characteristics of the Tolstoyian genius, and we do not want to anticipate in this Introduction the conclusions of the present volume. It will be sufficient for our purpose to call attention to some of those outstanding features which in his personality and in his works are typical of the Russian mind.

The first quality which strikes us in Tolstoy is his supreme originality—his total freedom from tradition or conventionality—his refusal to acknowledge any dogma or accept any belief merely as such, whether it be a

beliet in Shakespeare or in the Bible, or in the French Revolution, or in doctrinaire Socialism. That quality of absolute originality is especially Russian. A Westerner, consciously or unconsciously, will be influenced by those great traditions of the past which form the intellectual or spiritual inheritance of the race—whether it be the tradition of Roman Catholicism, or of the Italian Renaissance, or of the French Monarchy of Louis XIV. Even the most revolutionary thinker will not escape from those subtle influences. Voltaire, who recognized no authority or tradition, believed in the authority of the Three Classical Unities. Danton and Robespierre, who had ceased to believe in a king by Right Divine, continued to believe in the inspired political wisdom of the republics of Greece and Rome, and in the heroes of Plutarch.

Such adherence to historical tradition is absolutely unknown in Russia. There is no

dead weight of the past. The virgin soil of the empire of the Tsars is not mixed up with the ashes of fifty generations. There is more history in a few square miles of the desolate Roman Campagna than in the hundreds of thousands of square miles of the Russian Tchernoziom. The mind of the Russian is directed to what shall be and not to what has been. Hence that fearlessness, that incapacity to accept foregone conclusions, that unconventionality, that freshness of outlook which we admire so much in a typical Russian like Tolstoy.

In no other part of his philosophy has Tolstoy been more uncompromising than in his doctrine of Passive Resistance. Again that doctrine is specifically Russian. In their struggle against adversity, the Russian people have learned the lesson of Oriental fatalism, or rather of Christian resignation. The Russian knows how to bear inevitable evils. He always knows how to die, if he does not

know how to live. He knows how to oppose a stoic and a heroic resistance to destiny.

Another characteristic attitude of Tolstoy is his opposition to any kind of hero-worship. No writer has denied more consistently than Tolstoy the influence of the Great Man. On that essential point he entirely separates himself from Carlyle, with whom otherwise he has so much in common. No writer has been more uncompromisingly democratic. But this negation of hero-worship, this iconoclasm, is again typically Russian. The Russians are born democrats and Socialists. The *Mir*, or village community, is pre-eminently a Russian institution. For untold generations the peasants have lived in their little Socialist republics. In Russia the individual counts for very little. It is only by co-operation and association that the difficulties of life can be solved. As there are no inequalities in the infinite level plain, so there are few inequalities in the social conditions. The

nobility is a Court nobility, the nobleman is a *dvorianine*, attached to the *dvor*, or palace, of the Tsar. Russia has produced no independent aristocracy, such as exists in England or Prussia. There exists no right of primogeniture. There is, indeed, a mob of princes. There are three hundred princes *Galitzine* and two hundred princes *Troubet-skoy*; but the nobility are invested with no political power, and they are all equal before the Autocrat.

The peculiar anarchism of Tolstoy is again characteristic of the Slav mind. The Slav people have hitherto shown a strange impotence for political organization. And the despotism of Tsardom is largely explained by that incapacity of the Russians to govern themselves. The political ideal of the people has remained an ideal of paternal, patriarchal government tempered by rural Socialism.

No feature in Tolstoy's philosophy seems

stranger to the Western mind than his attitude to woman—as expressed, for instance, in the “Kreutzer Sonata.” This attitude again reflects the attitude of a race which still remains under the influence of the East, and of a Byzantine Church which has glorified asceticism—which has relegated the married clergy to the lower ranks of the hierarchy, and which has reserved all the higher dignities for the celibate monks.

In reading Tolstoy we understand all that literature has done for the Russian people. In some respects Russian literature is unique in the intellectual history of mankind. It is pre-eminently an heroic literature. The Russian writer is both a man of thought and a man of action. He has a cure of souls. He exercises an apostolate. The Russian printed book in the nineteenth century, even as the French book in the eighteenth, has been the chief and almost the only instrument of political and social enfranchisement. The

book in Russia has taken the place of the newspaper, of the pulpit, and of the parliamentary platform ; for under an autocratic *régime* the press was gagged, the Church had sold her birthright for a mess of pottage, and the Duma did not exist.

Nothing is more desolate or more tragical and more monotonous, and at the same time more stirring and more glorious, than the biography of Russian writers. Almost all those lives bear a striking resemblance. What a lamentable martyrology ! Radischef, one of the first who dared to attack the horrors of serfdom, exiled to Siberia by Catherine the Great and driven to suicide ! Poushkin and Lermontof killed in a duel ! Griboiedof murdered ! Bielinski, the greatest Russian critic ; Solovioff, the greatest philosopher ; and Tchechov, the greatest story-writer—all prematurely carried away by an implacable climate ! Herzen, Saltikof, Tchernitchevsky, and Kropotkin condemned

to exile ! Dostoievski condemned to the mines—*damnatus ad metalla*—and spending his best years in the “ House of the Dead ” ! Plescheef, Pisaref, and Maxim Gorki doomed to prison ! And all, without exception, closely watched, pursued by the police, and destined under a hostile Government to a life of poverty and starvation.

In this illustrious roll of martyrs, in this struggle for freedom, Tolstoy occupies a place of honour. It is true that he has not been subjected to imprisonment. He has only been subjected to the excommunication of an effete Church—to the thunderbolts of a so-called spiritual power which has ceased to be spiritual, and which is no longer a power.

But this very immunity from persecution is the most signal tribute to Tolstoy's genius and to his magnetic influence. For he wrote with fearless boldness, with prophetic fervour. In the darkest days of political



reaction he denounced every abuse. He incited the Russian people to refuse military service, to disobey the laws. Alone in the empire of the Tsars, Tolstoy was above the law. His person was sacred against the oppressor. Alone he enjoyed the rights of a free subject. Alone he saved the Russian people from a total eclipse of freedom of thought and conscience. For a quarter of a century he was the moral and religious conscience of Russia, and indeed of the civilized world.

# LIFE OF TOLSTOY

## Chapter I

### CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

THE relation which the personality of a writer bears to his literary productions is very different in different writers. There are writers who are essentially objective. They seem to be independent of circumstances. They do not allow the accidents of destiny to dim their clear vision of reality. A poet like Shakespeare stands outside and above his own productions, even as the creator stands separate from his creation. We may study the masterpieces of Molière without suspecting that the greatest comic

poet of all times had lived the saddest of lives. We may study Don Quixote without realizing that the life of Cervantes was one long tragedy.

And there are other writers who are essentially subjective. It is impossible to understand their works without a minute knowledge of their character and of their life-history. Dante places in hell those whom he most hated, and he places in paradise those whom he most loved and admired. Similarly every poem of Goethe's is in a sense an occasional poem — a *Gelegenheitsgedicht*. Every poem of Victor Hugo's has been suggested or influenced by the accidents of his career, or has been written in vindication of himself.

The same subjectivity holds true of Tolstoy. His Titanic individuality stamps itself on whatever he writes. I do not know another writer whose works are more intimately bound up with the events of his life.

Even in his wildest and boldest flights he does not draw on his imagination. His fiction is never distinct from reality. And it is always his own reality as evolved from his own experience, as reflected in his own moods. It is no mere accident that Tolstoy should have begun his literary activity with an autobiography—that is to say, that he should have started where most writers leave off, and that again, in the latter part of his life, he should in his “Confession” have laid his soul bare to all the world. Indeed, all his works are autobiographical. All his heroes—Irtienief, Olenine, Nechludof, Levine, Bezoukhof—are the reflection of his own protean and promethean self. Or his stories are the lives of people more or less directly connected with his own life-story. His “Raid,” his “Cossacks,” and his “Sevastopol War Sketches” are the first-fruits of his experiences in the Caucasus and in the Crimea. His “Family Happiness” tells the history

of one of the love episodes of his early life, and reflects his own views about love and marriage ; and when the hero, after proposing marriage, hands over to his *fiancée* a written confession of the misdeeds of his stormy youth, he only does what Tolstoy himself did, three years after publishing "Family Happiness," when proposing to Sonia Behrs. Even "War and Peace" is in a large measure the chronicle of his own family. The elder Rostof is the paternal grandfather of Tolstoy himself, the younger Rostof is his own father. Sonia is his "Aunty" Tatiana, who twice refused to be his father's wife ; Natascha Rostof is his sister-in-law, Tatiana Behrs. Bezoukhof and Levine are composite photographs of his own self. The death of the brother of Levine is the death of his own brother Dimitri. The extraordinary action taken by Nechludof in "Resurrection," which has generally been criticized as psychologically

improbable, is only a reminiscence from the life of the same Dimitri. Like Nechudof, Dimitri married a prostitute. The medical scenes in "War and Peace," in "Anna Karenina," and in the "Death of Ivan Ilyitch," and the even more ferocious onslaught against doctors in the "Kreutzer Sonata," express his own contempt of medical quackery ; and, whilst being the outcome of his philosophy, are his revenge for the tortures which the doctors inflicted upon himself.

Thus from beginning to end the biography of Tolstoy is a running commentary of his own works, and no self-revelation is more absolutely truthful nor takes more frequently the form of confessions. No modern writer has more systematically practised the "know thyself" of Socrates. He who eventually was to become the most unselfish of men, remained to the end the most egotistic, the most introspective. Knowledge of *self* always appeared to him of all forms of knowledge the

most accessible and the most invaluable : the most accessible because we always have the material of study at our disposal ; the most invaluable because alone it reaches the fundamental reality—the secrets of the human soul. From his early childhood Tolstoy kept a diary, and this diary, extending over sixty-five years, and only interrupted during the composition of the great novels, will probably cover, when published, forty bulky volumes. Altogether, the writings of Tolstoy constitute, to use the expression of Professor Brückner, “ the most monumental autobiography extant in any language.”

Tolstoy has recorded the main facts of his childhood in the first and not the least striking of his works. He has most perversely intermingled fiction with reality. He describes the death of his mother, which he cannot possibly have witnessed. He does not mention the death of his father. He tells us of the second marriage of his father, which did not

take place. He does not mention his "Aunty" Tatiana, who was his guardian angel. Yet "Childhood," although entirely unreliable in matters of fact, wonderfully reproduces the moral and spiritual atmosphere in which Tolstoy passed his early years. Irtenief is in all essentials the child Tolstoy, and the child Tolstoy is father to the man. The book reveals his precocious love for the humble and for the simple in mind—it reveals his profound religious sense even in his most remote adolescence; but above all, it reveals what no biographer has sufficiently pointed out—how every factor in his early upbringing intensified his uncompromising individualism and sowed the seed of that political anarchism which is the most outstanding feature of his system.

Leo Nikolaievich Tolstoy was born in 1828, ten years after his great rival Turgenieff, in the government of Toula. Toula is situated in the centre of the Grand-Duchy of Mus-



covy, on the boundary line of the two great natural regions of Russia, the agricultural zone and the forest zone, on the outskirts of the primeval forest which once served as a protection against the Tartar hordes. As Leroy Beaulieu remarks, no Finns, Tartars, Poles, Jews, or Little Russians are to be found in the province. It is the very heart of Old Russia. In the lives of many Russian writers we are puzzled by the frequent admixture of the most heterogeneous foreign elements. Poushkin had negro blood in his veins; Turgenief was of Tartar descent; Kantemir and Karamsine had Turkish, Roumanian, and Greek elements in their composition. There is no such admixture in Tolstoy. He is a pure Russian. When he grew to manhood Russian writers were divided into two classes: the Conservative Slavophiles, or "Nationalists," and the Liberal Zapadniki, or Westerners. Tolstoy at heart always sided with the Old Russians and the Slavophiles. On my visit to

him in 1905 I remember that his last words to me were: "If you want to understand Russia intimately, you must study our great Slavophil writers."

Let us further observe that Tolstoy was born in the country, many miles from the nearest provincial town. He owed in large measure to his rural nurture that freshness and originality which he could not have preserved amid the conventions of city life. But he owed to it a great deal more—namely, the very foundations of his philosophy. Like Ruskin, he considered the whole development of modern industry and science as a curse, and he only saw salvation in a return to the land. Country life and an intimate communion with Nature always remained to him the condition of health and of a happy existence, and as civilization is bound up with city life, civilization was condemned by Tolstoy as a disease.

And let us finally note that Tolstoy was

born on the estate of his fathers, and that his genius had a local habitation. For eighty years he lived at Yasnaya Polyana, and even in his stormy youth the prodigal son again and again returned to his ancestral home. Yasnaya Polyana is as closely identified with Tolstoy as Weimar is with Goethe, or Abbotsford with Sir Walter Scott. The time came when Yasnaya Polyana became indeed what its name signifies, "the bright glade amidst the surrounding gloom"—when, in the darkness of Russian reaction, it became a pilgrimage for believers in his message from all parts of the world.

By birth Tolstoy belonged to the upper strata of Russian society. The ancestor of the family was Peter Tolstoy, one of the courtiers of Peter the Great, ambassador to Constantinople, created a count, a new-fangled title recently imported from Germany. After a chequered career, which was the common lot of favourites in those troubled times, he

was deprived of his office, titles, and estates, and died in exile in the Solovetz monastery, far away amidst the ice of the Arctic Sea.

The title of count was revived in favour of his great-grandson, Count Elias Tolstoy, the grandfather of the writer. He married the Princess Gortschakof, and became through family influence governor of Kazan. Easy-going and generous to the verge of extravagance, he lived long enough to see himself bankrupt. He is the prototype of the older Rostof in "War and Peace." His son, Nicholas Tolstoy, served in the great Napoleonic wars. We are told that before he joined the army, and when he was only sixteen, his parents arranged a *liaison* between him and a peasant girl—such connections being considered necessary for the health of young men. A son was born, and Tolstoy records his strange feeling of consternation when, in after years, "this brother of mine, fallen into destitution and bearing a

great resemblance to me, used to beg help of us, and was thankful for the ten or fifteen roubles we used to give him." It is necessary to keep such facts in our minds if we want to understand the surroundings amidst which our writer grew up to manhood.—(Aylmer Maude, I.)

After the Napoleonic wars Nicholas Tolstoy retired from the army with the rank of lieutenant-colonel. Finding himself completely ruined, and having to support his mother and distant cousin, he set himself to retrieve the family fortunes, and, like young Rostof in "War and Peace," he married the wealthy but plain and middle-aged Princess Marie Volkonsky, whose mother was a Princess Troubetzkoy, and whose father had been a commander-in-chief under Catherine the Great. He was a man of strong and striking personality, and is the original of the old Prince Bolkonsky in "War and Peace." It is through Marie Volkonsky that the Yasnaya Polyana estate came to the Tolstoy family.

Tolstoy was thus connected with some of the ruling families of the Russian Empire. It is true that his own family had become impoverished, but this only meant that Leo Nikolaievich obtained the advantages of rank without the disadvantages and temptations of excessive wealth. Although in later years he fiercely attacked all the privileges of his caste, and eventually came to drop his title, yet there can be no doubt that to the position to which he was born he owed a broader outlook on life, a stronger sense of independence, a greater confidence in himself, and that wider experience and those ampler opportunities of culture which come with leisure and social position.

Nor must we forget that there existed in his family on both sides a long tradition of political opposition and independence. One relation of his mother joined the conspiracy of the Decembrists. Those lessons were not lost on the offspring.

It is difficult for us to realize the life of a Russian country nobleman in the days of serfdom. We seem to be taken back far beyond the Middle Ages, to prehistoric times. The country nobleman was a patriarchal despot, with almost uncontrolled power over his slaves. His despotism would be malevolent or benevolent according to the character of the individual. Where the master was a good man the life was one of primeval simplicity, such as is recorded in the Homeric poems. Certainly the conditions of serfs under a good master would be far better than those of our industrial serfs in our capitalistic age. In the home of the Tolstoys the relations between the family and the thirty domestic serfs were most affectionate, and it is noteworthy that it is a serf who is the most beautiful character in "Childhood."

The conditions of patriarchal home life of a Russian magnate living on his estate with two or three generations continuing under the

same roof must have had a peculiar fascination of intimacy, and must have moulded character as no other conditions could mould it. Certainly the self-centred existence in a Russian manor-house would tend to develop the family affections even more intensely than in France, and certainly far more than in England. And this point needs to be borne in mind if we wish to understand one of the most important peculiarities of Tolstoy's art, to which we have already made a passing reference. It has not been sufficiently noticed by Tolstoy's critics that it is *the family*, and not the individual, that is the organic unit in Tolstoy's great novels. "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina" are, in large measure, *family chronicles*, and the plot revolves round the fortunes of the Rostofs, of the Volkonskys, and of the Levines.

On the other hand, the independent, self-sufficient family life, such as existed in the pre-emancipation days, would tend to pro-



duce a complete atrophy of the political sense. There was little to remind the nobleman that he was a member of a commonwealth, and that he owed the common weal any other duty except payment of taxes. Indeed, the manor was a state within a state. There is a Russian proverb : "*Do Boga visoko, do Tsaria dalioko !*" ("God is too high, the Tsar is too far !") Tsardom was too remote to give any thought or concern to the noblemen living isolated on the land. It is all the more necessary to bear this in mind, because this life of political isolation and independence was one more factor which developed the anarchic tendencies so strong in Tolstoy, as in many Russian writers.

The premature death of his parents, and the removal of parental discipline, still further developed the individualistic temperament of Tolstoy. His mother was a woman of a noble character and of a most affectionate disposition. Her son has drawn an exquisite

portrait of her in "Childhood" from reminiscences surviving in the family. She died when he was little over a year old. His father, an amiable and independent character, entirely devoid of ambition, only survived his wife for six years. The little boy, an orphan at eight years of age, was left to the care of his relatives.

Amongst these there are two who stand out prominently, and who had an enormous influence on the development of Tolstoy's affections: his aunt, Countess Alexandra Ilynishna Osten-Sacken,\* and "Aunt" Tatiana Alexandrovna Ergolsky.

His aunt Alexandra was a saint. There can be little doubt that she sowed the religious seed which was to bear fruit fifty years later. Tolstoy has given us the following sketch of her:—

\* Not to be confused with another "Aunt" Alexandra—namely, Countess Alexandra A. Tolstoy, a Maid of Honour of the Bedchamber. A most interesting correspondence of Tolstoy with that lady is to be published. See Dr. Hagberg Wright's illuminative introduction to the first volume of the posthumous works published by Messrs. Nelson.

“My aunt was a truly religious woman. Her favourite occupation was reading the lives of the saints, conversing with pilgrims, half-crazy devotees, monks, and nuns, of whom some always lived in our house, while others only visited my aunt. . . . She was not merely outwardly religious, keeping the fasts, praying much, and associating with people of saintly life, but she herself lived a truly Christian life, trying not only to avoid all luxury and acceptance of service, but herself serving others as much as possible. She never had any money, for she gave away all she had to those who asked. A servant related to me how, during their life in Moscow, my aunt used carefully on tip-toe to pass her sleeping maid when going to matins, and used herself to perform all the duties which it was in those days customary for a maid to perform. In food and dress she was as simple and unexact as can possibly be imagined. Unpleasant as it is

to me to mention it, I remember from childhood a specific acid smell connected with my aunt, probably due to negligence in her toilet—and this was the graceful, poetic Aline, with beautiful eyes, who used to love reading and copying French verses, who played on the harp, and always had great success at the grandest balls! I remember how affectionate and kind she always was, and this equally to the most important men and women and to the nuns and pilgrims.”

Even more profound and more lasting was the influence of “Auntie” Tatiana. She was a very distant relative, an orphan, and, according to Russian custom, had been adopted, like Sonia in “War and Peace,” by Tolstoy’s paternal grandparents. She must have possessed extraordinary charm, as well as a most beautiful character. She was the first love of Count Nicholas, who proposed to her; but, like Sonia in “War and Peace,” she

sacrificed herself to enable her lover to retrieve the family fortunes and to marry the rich Princess Marie Volkonsky. Six years after his wife's death Count Nicholas again asked Tatiana to marry him and to be a mother to his children. "Not wishing," Tolstoy tells us, "to spoil her pure, poetic relations with his family, she refused the first but fulfilled the second of these requests." The other aunt became the legal guardian of the orphan children ; "Aunt" Tatiana became their guardian angel.

"She must have been very attractive, with her enormous plait of crisp black curling hair, her jet-black eyes, and vivacious, energetic expression. When I remember her she was more than forty, and I never thought about her as pretty or not pretty. I simply loved her eyes, her smile, and her dusky broad little hand, with its energetic little cross vein.

“ We had two aunts and a grandmother. They all had more right to us than Tatiana Alexandrovna, whom we called aunt only by habit (for our kinship was so distant that I could never remember what it was), but she took the first place in our upbringing by right of love to us (like Buddha in the story of the wounded swan), and we felt her right.

“ I had fits of passionately tender love for her.

“ I remember once, when I was about five, how I squeezed in behind her on the sofa in the drawing-room, and she caressingly touched me with her hand. I caught it, and began to kiss it, and to cry with tender love of her. . . .

“ Aunt Tatiana had the greatest influence on my life. From early childhood she taught me the spiritual delight of love. She taught me this joy, not by words, but by her whole being ; she filled me with love. I saw, I felt,

how she enjoyed loving, and I understood the joy of love. This was the first thing.

“Secondly, she taught me the delights of an unhurried, quiet life.”

Tolstoy was the youngest of four brothers. His three elder brothers all showed strong originality and independence of character, but in their case the total lack of discipline was fatal to success. All three, socially as well as morally, proved more or less failures. Tolstoy's second brother, Sergius, made his favourite company that of gipsy girls, whom he brought to Yasnaya Polyana, and he ended by marrying one. His oldest brother, Nicholas, who by all accounts was a man of extraordinary gifts, entered the army, took to drink in the Caucasus, recovered, but died without achieving distinction. His third brother, Dimitri, also gave way to drink, and eventually married a prostitute. Both died of consumption, which was largely the result of

dissolute living. In the character of Levine's brother, in "Anna Karenina," Tolstoy has combined the character and life-history of both Nicholas and Dimitri. There can be no doubt that the influence of his elder brothers, whom he loved and admired, and the absence of paternal restraint, were largely responsible for the wild youth of Tolstoy, which nearly wrecked his career.

His upbringing was that of all children of the upper classes. He was privately educated by German and French tutors, and therefore never imbibed that corporate spirit, or acquired that sense of loyalty and responsibility, which is the life-breath of an English public-school boy. Like most Russians of his class Tolstoy early became a good linguist. He never attained complete mastery of English, but he had an excellent knowledge of German and a perfect knowledge of French, which is proved by many letters to his aunt in that language.



Until the last generation, and the growth of the national spirit under Alexander III., French was, in the aristocracy, the language of ordinary intercourse.\* Even during the patriotic wars of 1812, when the hatred against France had reached fever heat, the nobility continued to speak the language of their invaders. Tolstoy, with his infallible sense of historic accuracy, has reproduced the French atmosphere in the opening chapters of "War and Peace"; and it is strange that such an excellent translator like Mrs. Constance Garnett should have ignored this important fact, and should thus have failed to render the spirit of the original.

From "Recollections of Childhood" we can gather the outstanding impressions which reveal the child, although Tolstoy himself warns us against their insincerity, and although he tells us that in "Childhood" he

\* It still is the language of fashion and society in "Resurrection."

describes himself as he would like to appear, not as he actually was.

One chapter refers to a peculiar feature of Russian life—to the visits of the half-crazy beggars and pilgrims who used to frequent his father's house :—

“ Whence did Grisha come? Who were his parents? What had incited him to choose the pilgrim's life? Nobody knew that. I only knew that he had been known as a saintly fool ever since his fifteenth year, that he walked barefoot in summer and winter, that he visited monasteries, presented images to those he took a fancy to, and spoke mysterious words which some regarded as prophecies. . . .

“ Much water has flowed since then, many memories of the past have lost all meaning for me and have become dim recollections, and pilgrim Grisha has long ago ended his last pilgrimage, but the

impression which he produced on me and the feeling which he evoked will never die in my memory.”—(“Childhood.” Wiener’s translation, page 47.)

Little did Tolstoy anticipate, when he wrote those lines in 1853, that a quarter of a century later he too, like Grisha, would take the pilgrim’s staff, and would mix and sleep with the beggars in the monasteries, and that half a century later he should seek his last resting-place in a humble convent of the steppe.

The second indelible impression was the shadow of death which darkened his early years. The obsession of death is one of the *leitmotifs* of Tolstoy’s works. Like the Duke of Saint-Simon he is an unrivalled painter of death scenes. We need only refer to the sketch “Three Deaths,” to the death of the old prince, of Prince André, and of Count Bezoukhof in “War and Peace,” to

the death of the brother of Levine in "Anna Karenina," to the "Death of Ivan Ilyitch."

We must picture to ourselves a strong, healthy, awkward, ungainly, and ugly-looking child, with thick lips, a flat and broad nose, with the coarse plebeian face which he retained throughout life, but whose coarseness gradually disappeared when genius began to illumine it with the rays of spiritual beauty ; with the little grey eyes whose piercing glance had not yet learnt to make people uncomfortable and to probe the inmost secrets of human hearts.

The sense of his ugliness tortured him all through his youth, and he has recorded his sufferings in the following passage of "Childhood" :—

"I knew very well that I was plain, and therefore every reference to my appearance was painfully offensive to me. . . . Moments of despair frequently came over

me: I imagined that there could be no happiness on earth for a man with so broad a nose, such thick lips, and such small grey eyes as mine. I asked God to perform a miracle and change me into a handsome boy; and all I then had, and all I could ever possess in the future, I would have given for a handsome face."

The child was clever, though not brilliant, precociously thoughtful, and showed an extraordinary aptitude for abstract speculation. He was peculiar and restless, vehement and impulsive, proud and moody, reticent and shy, and his shyness was still further increased by the consciousness of his ungainliness.

In 1843 Tolstoy's family migrated to Kazan, the ancient Tartar city on the Volga, which was the home of an aunt who was one of his legal guardians. Tolstoy matriculated as a student in the university, and it

is characteristic that he first joined the Faculty of Oriental Languages. There is in Tolstoy's genius a natural affinity to the Oriental mind. In later years, whilst all his contemporaries would invariably migrate west, Tolstoy always migrated eastwards. He found himself at home with the semi-savage Bachkirs and the Kirghiz tribes of the steppe. He bought himself an estate on the Eastern boundary of European Russia. Whether his Eastern associations developed his love for simplicity, or whether his love for simplicity attracted him to the East, one thing is certain—Tolstoy owes much less to Western influences than any of his contemporaries. It is especially in later life that his mind seemed more and more to travel eastwards. He came to believe that we had more to learn from the East than from the West, and as much from the Far East as from Palestine. His Christianity became less and less exclusive, and eventually he

came to recognize the claims of the religions of India and China.

Tolstoy was an indifferent student—as we would expect from a man of genius. Although “far from being a ladies’ man, and distinguished by that strange awkwardness and shyness” we referred to, he gave himself up to a life of social dissipation, attending balls and masquerades and private theatricals more assiduously than his university classes.

He posed as a young man of fashion and an *arbiter elegantiarum*. When he was nineteen years of age he began to visit houses of ill-fame. About this time he puts down in his diary his opinions of women — which are much the same as those he came to profess in the ’eighties.

“We must regard the society of women as a necessary unpleasantness of social life, and keep away from them as much as possible. From whom, indeed, do we get

sensuality, effeminacy, frivolity in everything, and many other vices, if not from women? Whose fault is it, if not women's, that we lose our innate qualities of boldness, resolution, reasonableness, justice, etc.? Women are more receptive than men, therefore in virtuous ages women are better than we; but in the present depraved and vicious age they are worse than we are."

He tried in succession the Faculty of Oriental Studies and the Faculty of Law, and he did not persevere in either. It is interesting to note that history was the weak subject of the future author of the greatest historical novel of the world's literature! He failed at least once in his examinations. But if we must believe his own testimony his failure was not due to his own fault.

"Ivanof, Professor of Russian History, prevented me from passing to the second



course (though I had not missed a single lecture and knew Russian history quite well) because he had quarrelled with my family. The same professor also gave me the lowest mark—a ‘one’—for German, though I knew the language incomparably better than any student in our division.”

After Easter 1847 Tolstoy sent in an application to have his name removed from the university roll, “on account of ill-health and family affairs.” In the autumn of the same year he moved to the university of Petersburg. At first he was full of enthusiasm for a city for which in later years he felt nothing but repulsion, and which he came to associate with the worst tendencies of Russian life. In February 1848 he writes to his brother Sergius:—

“I write you this letter from Petersburg, where I intend to remain *for ever*. . . . I

have decided to stay here for my examinations and then to enter the service. . . .

“In brief, I must say that Petersburg life has a great and good influence on me; it accustoms me to activity and supplies the place of a fixed table of occupations. Somehow one cannot be idle—every one is occupied and active; one cannot find a man with whom one could lead an aimless life, and one can’t do it alone. . . .

“I know you will not believe that I have changed, but will say, ‘It’s already the twentieth time, and nothing comes of you—the emptiest of fellows.’ No; I have now altered in quite a new way. I used to say to myself, ‘Now I will change;’ but at last I see that I *have* changed, and I say, ‘I have changed.’

“Above all, I am now quite convinced that one cannot live by theorizing and philosophizing, but must live positively—that is, must be a practical man. That is a great

step in advance, and a great change ; it never happened to me before. If one is young and wishes to live, there is no place in Russia but Petersburg for it. . . .”

But his good resolutions did not hold out. Less than three months afterwards the Petersburg experiment had proved a failure. Tolstoy had started again gambling and sowing his wild oats, and had decided to give up the university career and to enter the Horse Guards as a Junker.

“Seryozha, I think you already say I am ‘the emptiest of fellows,’ and it is true. God knows what I have done. I came to Petersburg without any reason, and have done nothing useful here, but have spent heaps of money and got into debt. Stupid ! Insufferably stupid ! You can’t believe how it torments me. Above all, the *debts*, which I *must pay as soon as possible*, because if I don’t

pay them soon, besides losing the money, I shall lose my reputation. . . . I know you will cry out ; but what's to be done ? One commits such folly once in a lifetime. I have had to pay for my freedom (there was no one to thrash me—that was my chief misfortune) and for philosophizing, and now I have paid for it. Be so kind as to arrange to get me out of this false and horrid position—penniless and in debt all round.”

But although an erratic student, in the strict academic sense, young Tolstoy was at that time what he always remained : an omnivorous reader, and inspired with an insatiable thirst for learning. He has recorded in his diary the books which had the greatest influence over him : “The Sermon on the Mount,” “David Copperfield,” Toepfer’s “Nouvelles Génevoises,” and, above all, the works of Jean Jacques Rousseau. Tolstoy admitted to the writer of these pages, as he

had previously admitted to M. Paul Boyer, that the influence of Rousseau was deeper and more lasting than that of any other writer.

“I have read the whole of Rousseau—all his twenty volumes, including his ‘Dictionary of Music.’ I was more than enthusiastic about him—I worshipped him. At the age of fifteen I wore a medallion portrait of him next my body instead of the orthodox cross. Many of his pages are so akin to me that it seems to me that I have written them myself.”

This influence may seem very strange when we consider how absolutely different were the circumstances of Rousseau’s and Tolstoy’s lives. Rousseau came from the people; Tolstoy was a born aristocrat. Rousseau was a vagabond; Tolstoy was a landowner. Rousseau was generally morbid; Tolstoy was always sane. In one respect the early life of both writers was identical: they both com-

bined high ethical principle and loose living. It is astonishing that in later years, when Tolstoy made his practice agree with his convictions, he should not have been repelled by the inconsistencies of Rousseau's life. But he probably would have answered that those inconsistencies were only superficial, and that in all fundamentals Rousseau's life was coherent and systematic. However this may be, there exists a striking parallelism between the philosophy of Rousseau and that of the Russian writer. Both reject the principles on which our modern civilization is founded ; both advocate in our lives a return to the simplicity of Nature, and in our religion a return to the simplicity of the Gospel. The parallelism exists even to the most minute details. Both have the hatred of city life, and glorify that of the peasant ; both express absolute scepticism in the powers of medicine ; both are vegetarians ; both extol manual labour ; both oppose compulsion in education.

The high ethical principles which Tolstoy imbibed from Rousseau and the "Sermon on the Mount" did not affect his conduct. His animal passions were strong, and no restraint of public opinion prevented him from indulging them. He was addicted to women and gambling. He made his favourite company of gipsy girls.

We must remember that the principles of the social circles in which he moved were very lax. As he tells us himself in his "Confession": "The kind aunt with whom I lived, herself the purest of beings, always told me that there was nothing she so desired for me than that I should have relations with a married woman. '*Rien ne forme un jeune homme, comme une liaison avec une femme comme il faut*' [Nothing so forms a young man, as an intimacy with a woman of good breeding]. Another happiness she desired for me was that I should become aide-de-camp, and if possible, aide-de-camp to the Emperor. But



YASNAYA POLYANA.





the greatest happiness of all would be that I should marry a very rich girl and become possessed of as many serfs as possible.'

Before applying any Puritan test in judging Tolstoy's conduct, we ought therefore to remember the influence of his surroundings; nor would it be fair to regard him as a youthful Don Juan, like Turgenief. For Turgenief, love-making and the making of books were the only two serious businesses of life, and it was impossible to do the one without doing the other. He could not write a love-story without being himself in love. Unlike his great rival, Tolstoy never boasted of his *bonnes fortunes*, and we cannot judge him more harshly than he judged himself. His gipsy moods alternated with fits of repentance. We can follow in his diary the fluctuations of his moral temperature. Spring generally brings a moral renovation; winter is the season that causes him to go wrong.

Nor can his frequent lapses prevent him from taking the most heroic resolutions. He knew his own weakness, yet he continued to set himself the most impossible tasks.

The following are some of the rules he prescribed to himself :—

1. To fulfil what I set myself, despite all obstacles.

2. To fulfil well what I do undertake.

3. Never to refer to a book for what I have forgotten, but always to try to recall it to mind myself.

4. Always to make my mind work with its utmost power.

5. Always to read and think aloud.

6. Not to be ashamed of telling people who interrupt me that they are hindering me : letting them first feel it, but (if they do not understand) telling them, with an apology.

His programme of studies was no less ambitious.

1. To study the whole course of law necessary to get my degree.
2. To study practical medicine, and, to some extent, its theory also.
3. To study French, Russian, German, English, Italian, and Latin.
4. To study agriculture, theoretically and practically.
5. To study history, geography, and statistics.
6. To study mathematics (High School course).
7. To write my university thesis.
8. To reach the highest perfection I can in music and painting.
9. To write down rules (for my conduct).
10. To acquire some knowledge of the natural sciences ; and
11. To write essays on all the subjects I study.

Before Tolstoy left the university he had

given up all religious beliefs and practices:—

“The religious beliefs taught me in childhood disappeared . . . and as from the time I was fifteen I began to read philosophic works, my rejection of those beliefs very soon became a conscious one. From the age of sixteen I ceased going to church and fasting of my own accord. I did not believe what had been taught me from childhood, but I believed in something. What it was I believed in I could not at all have said. I believed in a God—or, rather, I did not deny God; but I could not have said what sort of God. Neither did I deny Christ and His teaching; but what His teaching consisted in I could also not have said.

“Looking back on that time now, I see clearly that my faith—my only real faith; that which, apart from my animal instincts, gave impulse to my life—was a belief in

perfecting oneself. But in what this perfecting consisted, and what its object was, I could not have said. I tried to perfect myself mentally ; I studied everything I could—anything life threw in my way. I tried to perfect my will ; I drew up rules which I tried to follow. I perfected myself physically ; cultivating my strength and agility by all sorts of exercises, and accustoming myself to endurance and patience by all kinds of privations. And all this I considered to be perfecting myself. The beginning of it all was, of course, moral perfecting. But that was soon replaced by perfecting in general : by the desire to be better, not in one's own eyes or those of God, but in the eyes of other people. And very soon this effort again changed into a desire to be stronger than others : to be more famous, more important, and richer than others.”—(“Confession.”)

There can be no doubt that the three years

after Tolstoy had his name removed from the university roll were years of wild dissipation. But we cannot agree with Mr. Maude that those years were wasted; they were pre-eminently *Lehrjahre* and years of experiment, which were to bear rich fruit in later life. Like St. Augustin, he was to be a great sinner before he became the saint and the apostle of later days. And if he eventually became the incomparable anatomist of human passion, it was because he had himself felt all the passions, and because he had impersonated all the characters he was describing.

Still the fact remains that from 1848 to 1851 he "lived dangerously," to use the expression of Nietzsche, and that he came perilously near to being a tragic failure like his brothers. He was rescued from his own excesses by his marvellous spiritual vitality, and by the lucky accident of a journey to the Caucasus.

## Chapter II

### THE CAUCASUS

THE Caucasus has in all ages been pre-eminently the land of myth and legend. On the top of Ararat Noah's Ark rested after the Deluge ; on one of the Caucasian peaks Prometheus suffered for the welfare of mankind. Thither Jason set sail with the Argonauts in quest of the Golden Fleece.

And to the Russian, Transcaucasia has ever been the land of promise. He there found what he did not find at home—mountains, sunshine, and liberty. After the limitless plain, the Cyclopean wall of Elbruz and Ararat ; after the oppression of Tsardom, the freedom of savage life ; after the long dreary northern winter, eternal spring, smiling vine-



yards, primeval forests, and a sub-tropical luxuriant vegetation. To the Russian soldier the Caucasus was the nursery of heroic adventure ; to the Russian poet a source of inspiration. It inspired Poushkin's romance, "The Prisoner of the Caucasus," and his novel, "The Captain's Daughter"; it inspired the "Hero of our Time" of Lermontof; it inspired the nascent genius of Griboiedof before he found a premature death in its neighbourhood. It was now destined to awaken the muse of Tolstoy, and to make him first conscious of his powers.

When Tolstoy accompanied south his brother Nicholas, who was serving as an artillery officer in a Caucasian regiment, he only thought of making a pleasant trip to a new country, of seeking relief from temporary depression, and of escaping from his creditors and from the burden of his debts. But he was soon so enraptured by the startling vision of this strange world that he

decided to follow his brother's career. Already whilst at Petersburg he had thought of entering the army, and he had even intended to take part in that ill-fated campaign which assisted to quell the Hungarian insurrection and the Magyar struggle for freedom. Tolstoy's spirit was too independent for the bureaucracy. He was too erratic and too fond of country life for the sedentary pursuits of a university avocation. The army, therefore, was almost the only career that remained open to him. The uncompromising opponent of war that was to be does not seem in those days to have entertained any scruples as to the morality of the profession. The arduous task on which Russia was then engaged—that of subduing the indomitable hill tribes, addicted to predatory warfare—may have originally attracted his adventurous spirit and appeared to him as a great work worthy of Russia's future mission.

Everything appealed to him in his new surroundings — everything was attuned to his own soul : the gorgeous scenery, the free existence of the mountaineers, the beauty of the women. He found unique opportunities for every form of sport. He entered with keen zest into the life and manners of the natives, which seemed to bring him back to Homeric times.

Like Olenine, Tolstoy “often thought seriously of abandoning all else, enrolling himself as a Cossack, buying a cottage, and marrying a Cossack girl . . . and living with Uncle Eroshka, going with him to hunt and to fish, and with the Cossacks on expeditions. ‘Why don’t I do this? What am I waiting for?’ he asked himself. . . . But a voice told him to wait, and not to decide. He was restrained by a dim consciousness that he could not fully live the life of Eroshka and Loukashka, because he had another happiness—he was restrained by the thought

that happiness lies in self-sacrifice. . . . *He continually sought an opportunity to sacrifice himself for others, but it did not present itself.*"

But, if the truth be told, the Cossack girl would not have the ugly Junker. "Leo Nikholaievich fell deeply in love with a native beauty, but she remained indifferent to the attentions of a man who was inferior in the arts of war and hunting to some of the young men of her own tribe." His courtship failed (as he says of his hero in "The Cossacks") because he could not, like a dashing young Cossack, "steal herds, get drunk on Tchikir wine, troll songs, kill people, and, when tipsy, climb in at her window for a night, without thinking who he was or why he existed."

In the solitude of the Caucasus, in the interlude between a love intrigue and a military expedition, he was repeatedly visited by those alternate fits of religious depression and exaltation which were never long absent.

As we advance we shall again and again have to take note of these periodical visitations of the spirit, if only to prove the continuity of Tolstoy's spiritual life, the continual quest of the Holy Grail.

“For some time past repentance for the loss of the best years of life has begun to torment me, and this since I commenced to feel that I could do something good. . . . *There is something in me which compels me to believe that I was not born to be like everybody else.*”

“How must I live so as to be happy, and why was I formerly not happy?” And he remembered his previous life, and felt disgusted with himself . . . and suddenly a new light seemed revealed to him. “Happiness,” said he to himself, “consists in living for others. That is clear. The demand for happiness is innate in man; therefore it is legitimate. If we seek to satisfy it selfishly—by seeking wealth, fame, comforts, or love—circumstances may render the satisfaction of

these desires impossible. It follows that they are illegitimate, but not that the demand for happiness itself is illegitimate. But what desire is there that can always be satisfied in spite of external conditions? What desire? Love, self-sacrifice!" He was so glad and excited at discovering this, as it seemed to him, new truth: for whom he might quickly sacrifice himself—to whom he might do good, and whom he could love. "Yes, I need nothing for myself," he kept mentally repeating. "Then why not live for others?"

We must turn to one of his later masterpieces, "The Cossacks," to obtain an accurate idea of the impressions and the influence produced by his Caucasian experiences. The "Cossacks" are not a picture of the conventional savage, the untutored child of Nature, such as we find in Lord Byron's or in Chateaubriand's romances. Enthusiastic as Tolstoy was of the simple, untrammelled life of the mountain, keenly as he enjoyed it, he does

not idealize the mountaineers. They are described with all their characteristic vices, their lawlessness, their love of plunder, their cruelty, and their treachery. The chief interest of the book lies not in the glorification of the simple life, but in the inevitable conflict between primitive life and civilization.

It may appear strange that the Caucasian experiences should not have been fully worked out and published until ten years after he had left the scene of his early adventures, and it is characteristic of Tolstoy that when his literary powers were roused under the stimulus of his new surroundings he should, at the age of twenty-three, have selected as his subject the story of his early years—that is to say, a subject so entirely remote from his present experiences and so entirely uncongenial to a young man.\* It is natural enough for an old man to turn to the scenes of his youth :

\* See page 29.

a young man is not concerned with the distant past but with the living present. It is quite significant of Tolstoy's introspective genius that in the midst of the most gorgeous scenery of the Oriental world he should have devoted himself to registering the mysterious movements and the inner growth of his childhood, and that he should have first appeared before the world as the great anatomist of his own soul.

The first intimation we receive of his literary vocation is in a letter to his "Aunt" Tatiana :—

"Do you remember, dear aunt, the advice you once gave me to write novels? Well, I am following your advice, and the occupation I mentioned to you consists in producing literature. I do not know if what I am writing will ever be published, but it is a book that amuses me and in which I have persevered too long to give it up."



The chapters on "Childhood" were sent to the editor of the *Contemporary*, the Radical reforming magazine edited by the poet Nekrasof. It appeared in November 1852 under the initials "L. N. T." It is interesting to note that the author did not receive any remuneration for these first-fruits of his genius, under the pretence that it was not customary for the *Contemporary* to pay for the first articles of its contributors. Tolstoy was consoled by the announcement that if he would send another contribution he would receive the highest remuneration given to first-class authors—namely, seven pounds per sheet of sixteen pages.

The first part of the "Autobiography" is indeed a unique achievement when we consider the age and circumstances of the author. All the characteristics of the later Tolstoy appeared in this juvenile production: the merciless realism which sees things as they are, and not as idealized by the imagination;

the wonderful gift of psychological analysis which traces the most secret workings in the human heart ; the deep ethical and religious sense which approaches every human problem, not from the point of view of the artist, but from the point of view of the teacher and preacher.

The "Autobiography" and its appearance attracted universal attention. It says a great deal for the penetration of Russian critics that they should at once have discovered the new star that was dawning on the literary horizon, and that they should at once have realized the supreme literary value and the striking originality of these reminiscences, so entirely devoid of any intrinsic interest, yet so full of spiritual beauty.

The immediate recognition of Tolstoy's genius by the literary world did not, in the meantime, further his professional advancement. After eighteen months of service he did not secure any promotion. He began to

be dissatisfied with his new career and to feel that, after all, he was not much more suited for a military calling than for the Civil Service. His independent spirit could not submit even to the small amount of discipline that was demanded of a soldier in a Caucasian regiment. Writing of a military review, he says: "It is not very pleasant to have to march about and fire off cannons, *especially as it disarranged the regularity of my life*;" and he rejoiced when it was over and he was again able to devote himself to "hunting, writing, reading, and conversation with Nicholas."

About this time also we begin to find the first indication of the anti-military spirit which was one day to take possession of him :—

"What nonsense and confusion ! A man kills another, and is as happy and satisfied as though he had done an excellent deed. Does

nothing tell him there is here no cause for great rejoicing ?—that happiness consists not in killing others, but in sacrificing oneself ?

“ Nature, beautiful and strong, breathed conciliation.

“ Can it be that people have not room to live in this beautiful world, under this measureless, starry heaven ? Can feelings of enmity, vengeance, or lust to destroy one’s fellow-beings retain their hold on man’s soul amid this enchanting Nature ? All that is evil in man’s heart should, one would think, vanish in contact with Nature, the immediate expression of beauty and goodness.”

Whatever be the cause of his dissatisfaction, certainly Tolstoy at that time was not popular either with his fellow-officers or with the authorities. In later life he never courted popularity, but at this early stage of his career he was decidedly unpopular, and probably deserved to be. He was shy and unsociable,

presuming on his birth ; affected and snobbish, he would look down on a man for not wearing gloves ; and he preferred the company of the hill girls and the brigands to that of his brother-officers, merely because these were not of his own rank of society.

Yet under that affected exterior was hidden a tender and passionate heart. Only a strong emotional and affectionate temperament could have written some of the chapters of "Childhood" and many of the letters which at this time he wrote to his "Aunt" Tatiana.

The following letter gives an insight into the young soldier's inmost soul.

"I have just received your letter of 24th November, and I reply at once (as I have formed the habit of doing). I wrote you lately that your letter made me cry, and I blamed my illness for that weakness. I was wrong. For some time past all your letters

have had the same effect on me. I always was Leo Cry-baby. Formerly I was ashamed of this weakness, but the tears I shed when thinking of you and of your love for us are so sweet that I let them flow without any false shame. Your letter is too full of sadness not to produce the same effect on me. It is you who have always given me counsel; and though, unfortunately, I have not always followed it, I should wish all my life to act only in accord with your advice. For the moment, permit me to tell you the effect your letter has had on me, and the thoughts that have come to me while reading it. If I speak too freely, I know you will forgive it, on account of the love I have for you. By saying that it is your turn to leave us, to rejoin those who are no more, and whom you have loved so much—by saying that you ask God to set a limit on your life, which seems to you so insupportable and isolated—pardon me, dear aunt, but it seems to me that in so

saying you offend God and me and all of us who love you so much. . You ask God for death—that is to say, for the greatest misfortune that can happen to me. (This is not a phrase, for God is my witness that the two greatest misfortunes that could come to me would be your death and that of Nicholas—the two persons whom I love more than myself.) What would be left to me if God granted your prayer? To please whom should I then wish to become better, to have good qualities and a good reputation in the world? When I make plans of happiness for myself, the idea that you will share and enjoy my happiness is always present. When I do anything good, I am satisfied with myself because I know you will be satisfied with me. When I act badly, what I most fear is to cause you grief. Your love is everything to me, and you ask God to separate us! I cannot tell you what I feel for you; words do not suffice to express it. I fear lest you

should think I exaggerate; and yet I shed hot tears while writing to you."

There is another letter to his "aunty" which is equally instructive, and which reveals to us his ideal of life as he then conceived it :—

"Religion and the experience I have of life (however small it may be) have taught me that life is a trial. In my case it is more than a trial—it is also an expiation of my faults.

"It seems to me that the frivolous idea I had of journeying to the Caucasus was an idea with which I was inspired from above. It is the hand of God that has guided me—I do not cease to thank Him for it. I feel that I have become better here—and that is not saying much, for I was very bad—and I am firmly persuaded that all that can happen to me here can only be for my good, since it is God Himself who has so willed it. Perhaps



it is a very audacious notion ; nevertheless it is my conviction. That is why I bear the fatigues and the physical privations I have mentioned—they are not physical privations ; there are none for a fellow of twenty-three who is in good health—without resenting them, and even with a kind of pleasure in thinking of the happiness that awaits me.

“This is how I picture it :—

“After an indefinite number of years, neither young nor old, I am at Yasnaya ; my affairs are in order—I have no anxieties or worries. You also live at Yasnaya ; you have aged a little, but you are still fresh and in good health. We lead the life we used to lead. I work in the morning, but we see one another almost all day. We have dinner. In the evening I read aloud something which does not weary you, and then we talk. I tell you of my life in the Caucasus, you tell me your recollections of my father and mother ; and you tell me the ‘terrible tales’ we used

to listen to with frightened eyes and open mouths. We remind each other of those who were dear to us and who are now no more ; you will weep—I shall do the same : but those tears will be sweet. We talk about my brothers, who will come to see us from time to time ; of dear Marie, who with all her children will also spend some months of the year at Yasnaya, which she loves so much. We shall have no acquaintances—no one will come to weary us and carry tales. It is a beautiful dream. But it is not all that I let myself dream. I am married : my wife is a gentle creature, kind and affectionate ; she has the same love for you as I have. We have children who call you grandmamma. You live upstairs in the big house, in what used to be grandmamma's room. The whole house is as it was in papa's time, and we recommence the same life, only changing our rôles. You take the rôle of grandmamma—but you are still better ; I take

papa's place, though I despair of ever deserving it ; my wife, that of mamma ; the children take ours ; Marie, that of the two aunts, excepting their misfortunes. . . . But some one will be lacking to take the part you played in our family—never will any one be found with a soul so beautiful, so loving, as yours : you have no successor. There will be three new characters who will appear from time to time on the scene—the brothers, especially the one who will often be with us—Nicholas: an old bachelor, bald, retired from service, as good and noble as ever. I imagine how he will, as of old, tell the children fairy tales of his own invention, and how they will kiss his greasy hands (but which are worthy of it) ; how he will play with them ; how my wife will bustle about to get him his favourite dishes ; how he and I will recall our common memories of days long past ; how you will sit in your accustomed place and listen to us with pleasure ;

how, as of yore, you will call us, old men, 'Lyovotchka' and 'Nikolenka,' and will scold me for eating with my fingers, and him for not having clean hands.

"If they made me Emperor of Russia, or gave me Peru—in a word, if a fairy came with her wand asking me what I wished for—my hand on my conscience, I should reply that I only wish that this dream may become a reality."

It is noteworthy that to the writer of this letter, even at this stage, no idea of military promotion or worldly honours, or even of literary glory, entered into the idea of happiness. The dreams of the young man of twenty-three entirely centred on visions of domestic happiness and of a quiet country life. Tolstoy had to wait for another ten years, and had to pass through many chequered experiences, and succumb to many temptations, before his ideal could become a

reality. In the meantime the present was dark enough. He was poor and crippled with debt, and dissatisfied with his profession. He had only entered the army eighteen months before, and already he had applied for his discharge. But before he re-entered civilian life he was destined to take part in one of the most stirring and eventful wars of modern times.

## Chapter III

### THE CRIMEAN WAR

**I**N an often quoted passage of his "Autobiography," Gibbon reminds us that his experiences as a volunteer proved an invaluable discipline for the future historian of the Roman Empire. Similarly, it may be said that the Crimean War was an admirable training-ground for the future author of "War and Peace." The apostle of the peace ideal that was to be was not a mere doctrinaire who had never seen what he described, but one who had himself witnessed the horrors of a great European conflict.

It is now universally admitted, by English as well as French historians, that the Crimean War was a lamentable blunder on the part of

England, and that it was a crime on the part of France. England and France refused to make any sacrifice of their political ambitions, and refused to come to any understanding in order to deliver the Slav countries from the yoke of the unspeakable Turk, and at the same time they refused to allow Russia to take any steps in favour of the oppressed nationalities of the Balkans, who belonged to the same race and professed the same religion. The Turkish wars have always been popular with all classes of the Russian people, because they generally were forced on them, and because their object—the enfranchisement of their Slav brethren—was very near to their hearts. They have only become unpopular at a later stage because a bureaucratic Government generally proved hopelessly unequal to its task, and because the Radical party was only too eager in Russia, as elsewhere, to exploit any mismanagement or misfortunes of the Government.

The war broke out in October 1853, on the occupation by Russia of the Danubian principalities, a few months before Tolstoy's return from the Caucasus. This was not the time to leave the army. Tolstoy decided to remain, and he at once joined the army corps which had commenced operations on the Danube. From the outset he is caught by the war fever. He is so little impressed by the horrors of war that he is disappointed when the Russians, under the pressure of Austria, had to raise the siege of Silistria—a decision which probably prevented the needless butchery of fifty thousand lives. He is delighted with his fellow-officers, because they are mostly “gentlemen” (“*des gens comme il faut*”) “and not merely uneducated soldiers of the line.” One day (in “Resurrection” and in many an anti-militarist pamphlet) he will speak differently of the “gentlemanly” spirit of the military hierarchy. But during the Crimean War



Tolstoy appears in the guise of a Jingo, and in the unfamiliar character of a hero-worshipper. His one ambition in life is to become an aide-de-camp to the commander, Prince Gortchakof, for whom he professes boundless admiration. In the following letter he expresses his enthusiasm for the spirit of the Russian army, which no Slavophil has exceeded :—

“The spirit of the army is beyond all description. In the times of ancient Greece there was not such heroism. Kornilof, making the round of the troops, instead of greeting them with, ‘Good health to you, lads!’ says: ‘If you have to die, lads, will you die?’ and the troops shout, ‘We’ll die, your Excellency! Hurrah!’ and they do not say it for effect. On every face one saw that it was not jest but earnest; and 22,000 men have already fulfilled the promise.

“A wounded soldier, almost dying, told





HAYMAKING AT YASNAYA POLYANA.

me they captured the 24th French Battery, but were not reinforced ; and he wept aloud. A company of marines nearly mutinied because they were to be withdrawn from the batteries in which they had been exposed to shell fire for thirty days. The soldiers extract the fuses from the shells. Women carry water to the bastions for the soldiers. Many are killed and wounded. The priests with their crosses go to the bastions and read prayers under fire. In one brigade, the 24th, more than 160 wounded men would not leave the front. It is a wonderful time ! Now, however, after the 24th, we have quieted down ; it has become splendid in Sevastopol. The enemy hardly fires, and all are convinced that he will not take the town. It is really impossible. . . . I have not yet succeeded in being in action even once ; *but thank God that I have seen these people and live in this glorious time. The bombardment of the 5th (17th October, N.S.) remains the*

*most brilliant and glorious feat, not only in the history of Russia, but in the history of the world.*

More than 1,500 cannon were in action for two days against the town, and not only did not cause it to capitulate, but did not silence one two-hundredth part of our batteries. Though, I suppose, this campaign is unfavourably regarded in Russia, our descendants will place it above all others. Do not forget that we, with equal or even inferior forces, and armed only with bayonets, and with the worst troops in the Russian army (such as the 6th Corps), are fighting a more numerous enemy, aided by a fleet, armed with 3,000 cannon, excellently supplied with rifles and with their best troops. I do not even mention the superiority of their generals.” —(Aylmer Maude, I., 107.)

“Now you have seen the defenders of Sevastopol. The principal, joyous thought you have brought away is a conviction of the strength of the Russian people ; and this

conviction you gained, not by looking at all these traverses, breastworks, cunningly interlaced trenches, mines, and cannon, one on top of another, of which you could make nothing, but from the eyes, words, and actions—in short, from seeing what is called the ‘spirit’ of the defenders of Sevastopol.” —(Aylmer Maude, I., 118.)

The literary genius of Tolstoy is roused as well as his military spirit. He cannot resist the temptation of making use of the splendid copy which circumstances have provided for him. He conceives the idea of editing a military paper, “in order to maintain a good spirit in the army;” and although his finances are at a very low ebb, partly owing to fresh gambling debts, together with his friend Mr. Stolypine (the father of the late Prime Minister) he invests fifteen hundred roubles in this doubtful enterprise. It is perhaps as well that the military authori-

ties and the intrigues which surged around him soon damped his warlike ardour. It is difficult to conceive of Tolstoy as an official "war correspondent," mainly concerned "in maintaining a good spirit in the army." The personal equation soon transformed his early judgment; and when, at the end of the war, the disappointed sub-lieutenant failed to secure his promotion, and still found himself on the lowest rung of the military ladder, the last remnant of his enthusiasm evaporated, and he only thought—and this time for good—of obtaining his recall. He took this step all the more eagerly as he had ruined all his prospects, and had roused the indignation of the military authorities by some satirical couplets exposing the mismanagement of the war.

His financial difficulties contributed to depress his spirits. The old demon of gambling had pursued him during the campaign. Already overburdened with debts, he lost 2,500 roubles, and had to sell for

5,000 roubles his birthplace, the stately and ancient wooden structure, which was transferred from the grounds of Yasnaya Polyana to the village of Dolgoiè, where it still stands. He had resumed his old, dissipated habits. "He would vanish for one, two, or three days. . . . At last he would return, the very picture of a prodigal son!—sombre, worn-out, and dissatisfied with himself. . . . Then he would take me aside, quite apart, and would begin his confessions. He would tell me all: how he had caroused, gambled, and where he had spent his days and nights; and all the time, if you will believe me, he would condemn himself and suffer as though he were a real criminal. He was so distressed that it was pitiful to see him. That's the sort of man he was. In a word, a queer fellow, and, to tell the truth, one I could not quite understand. He was, however, a rare comrade, a most honourable fellow, and a man one can never forget!"



As always happened, together with fits of depression and self-reproofs there came a recurrence of the old religious misgivings. He gives us the following estimate of himself, which describes pretty accurately, although very pessimistically, his social and moral standing at that time:—

“I have no modesty. That is my great defect. What am I? One of four sons of a retired lieutenant-colonel, left at seven years of age an orphan, under the guardianship of women and strangers; having neither a social nor a scholarly education, and becoming my own master at seventeen; with no large means, no social position, and, above all, without principle; a man who has disorganized his own affairs to the last extremity, and has passed the best years of his life without aim or pleasure; and, finally, who, having banished himself to the Caucasus to escape his debts and more especially

his bad habits—and having there availed himself of some connection that had existed between his father and the general in command—passed to the army of the Danube at twenty-six, as a sub-lieutenant, almost without means except his pay (for what means he has he ought to employ to pay what he still owes), without influential friends, ignorant of how to live in society, ignorant of the service, lacking practical capacity, but with immense self-esteem ! Such is my social position. ‘ Let me see what I myself am like.’

“ I am ugly, awkward, uncleanly, and lack society education. I am irritable, a bore to others, not modest, intolerant, and as shame-faced as a child. I am almost an ignoramus. What I do know, I have learned anyhow, by myself, in snatches, without sequence, without a plan, and it amounts to very little. I am incontinent, undecided, inconstant, and stupidly vain and vehement, like all characterless people. I am not brave, I am not

methodical in life, and am so lazy that idleness has become an almost unconquerable habit of mine.

“I am clever, but my cleverness has as yet not been thoroughly tested on anything ; I have neither practical nor social nor business ability.

“I am honest—that is to say, I love goodness, and have formed a habit of loving it, and when I swerve from it I am dissatisfied with myself and return to it gladly. But there is a thing I love more than goodness, and that is fame. I am so ambitious, and so little has this feeling been gratified, that, should I have to choose between fame and goodness, I fear I may often choose the former.

“Yes, I am not modest, and therefore I am proud at heart, though shamefaced and shy in society.”

Yet, conscious as he is of his sins and of

his awkwardness, he believes he is under the protection of Providence :—

“ Lord, I thank Thee for Thy continual protection. How surely Thou leadest me to what is good. What an insignificant creature should I be if Thou abandoned me ! Leave me not, Lord ; give me what is necessary, not for the satisfaction of my poor aspirations, but that I may attain to the eternal, vast, unknown aim of existence which lies beyond my ken.”

And he firmly believes that he is reserved for a great task, that of founding a new religion :—

“ A conversation about divinity and faith has suggested to me a great, a stupendous idea, to the realization of which I feel myself capable of devoting my life. This idea is the founding of a new religion corresponding to the present state of man-

kind : *the religion of Christianity, but purged of dogmas and mysticism ; a practical religion not promising future bliss, but giving bliss on earth.* I understand that to accomplish this the conscious labour of generations will be needed. One generation will bequeath the idea to the next, and some day fanaticism or reason will accomplish it. Deliberately to promote the union of mankind by religion—that is the basic thought which, I hope, will dominate me.”—(Aylmer Maude, I., 130.)

Thus, twenty-five years before the great conversion of 1878, he lays down the religious programme which he was to carry out in every detail.

In his despondency the young officer sought consolation in literature. He composed the three sketches, “Sevastopol in December 1854,” “Sevastopol in May 1855,” and “Sevastopol in August 1855.” These sketches are very different in spirit

and in inspiration, and they reflect the fluctuations of the author's opinions in the course of the campaign. The first was still written under the influence of his early enthusiasm at the beginning of the war. The last two were written under the influence of his gradual disappointment at the end. "Sevastopol in May" shows Tolstoy entirely cured of the war fever. As in his impressions of the Caucasus, he appears here as the implacable realist. War is stripped of its pomp and circumstance, and some passages in the Sevastopol pictures announce the writer of "War and Peace."

He who, only six months before, had glorified the war, now curses the criminal slaughter of his fellow-men :—

"White flags are on the bastions and parallels; the flowery valley is covered with corpses; the beautiful sun is sinking towards the blue sea; and the undulating

blue sea glitters in the golden rays of the sun. Thousands of people crowd together, look at, speak to, and smile at one another. And these people—Christians confessing the one great law of love and self-sacrifice—seeing what they have done, do not at once fall repentant on their knees before Him who has given them life and laid in the soul of each a fear of death and a love of goodness and of beauty, and do not embrace like brothers with tears of joy and happiness.

“The white flags are lowered, again the engines of death and suffering are sounding, again innocent blood flows, and the air is filled with moans and curses.”

“The hero of my story,” says Tolstoy, “whom I love with all my strength, and whom I attempt to reveal in all her beauty, who was, and is, and always shall be beautiful, is *Truth*.”

Contemporary critics realized that this

quality of absolute truthfulness was, indeed, the new note which Tolstoy was striking in Russian literature :—

“The work,” wrote Nekrasof, “will always remain as proof of a strength able to utter such profound and sober truth under circumstances amid which few men would have retained it. It is just what Russian society now needs: the truth—the truth, of which, since Gogol’s death, so little has remained in Russian literature. You are right to value that side of your gifts most of all. Truth—in such form as you have introduced it into our literature—is something completely new among us.”

Prince Kropotkin, half a century later, confirms the verdict of Nekrasof :—

“All his powers of observation and war psychology, all his deep comprehension of



the Russian soldier, and especially of the plain, untheatrical hero who really wins the battles, and a profound understanding of that inner spirit of an army upon which depend success and failure—everything, in short, which developed into the beauty and the truthfulness of “War and Peace”—were already manifested in these sketches, which undoubtedly represented a new departure in war literature the world over.”

It is especially noticeable that the democratic view of history already obtrudes itself. Tolstoy has boundless admiration for the pluck and endurance of the humble soldier, but he entirely ignores the leadership and the elaborate mechanism which mainly arrest the attention of other military historians ; and it is remarkable that the illustrious General Todleben, with whose fame the whole of Europe resounded, is hardly mentioned by the Russian writer.

There is a story that the Empress, on reading the "Sevastopol Sketches," burst out in tears, and that Alexander II. gave orders to have the young writer removed from the thick of the fight, and to have him transferred to the less exposed position of a mountain battery. The rising hope of Russian literature was to be preserved for his country. Mr. Birukof gives the story without indicating his authority, and it is most probably a fabrication. But it is interesting as showing the profound impression produced by the "Sevastopol War Sketches" even in official circles.

Hitherto Tolstoy had been mainly known to a small *élite* of men of letters : his name had now become a household word to the Russian people.

## Chapter IV

### AFTER THE WAR—THE PETERSBURG PERIOD

THE period of storm and stress was not over. Tolstoy's bark was still to be tossed for a few years on tempestuous waves before coming into harbour. Mr. Aylmer Maude speaks of the post-graduate years as "amongst the wildest and most wasted years of his life" (Maude, I., 138). But again he speaks of the Petersburg period as "the stormiest and least satisfactory period of his life." If the truth be told, for fifteen years Tolstoy sowed his wild oats most liberally. The demonic element was very strong in him, and he had to fight the heroic struggles of his maturity before the demon could be exorcised.

When he returned to Petersburg after the war, Russia was breathing for the first time after thirty years of repression. The disastrous mismanagement of the war had laid bare the abuses of autocracy, and now that Nicholas I. had passed away, the strong ruler who for a generation had incarnated military despotism, a change of policy was inevitable. For the next decade were elaborated those great political and social reforms, one of the most stupendous achievements in modern history, which were to culminate in the liberation of the serfs, the expropriation of the Polish landlords, and the judicial and administrative reorganization of the Russian empire.

In the movement for reform, the publicists, the "Intelligenz," took the lead. In the absence of any independent church, or any representative institution, or any organized public body, the press was to the Russian emancipation movement what the

encyclopædists were to the French Revolution.

Most of the liberal writers were gathered round the great Radical journal, the *Souremennik*, or *Contemporary*, which had published Tolstoy's first writings. He therefore, naturally, on arriving in Petersburg, enrolled under their standard; but he soon discovered that he had enrolled under the wrong banner, and that, indeed, his aggressive temperament made it impossible for him to enroll under any banner at all.

The emancipation movement was influenced by Western ideals. The Western spirit was represented by Petersburg, the capital of bureaucracy. The old national spirit was represented by Moscow, the holy city of the anointed autocrat. Tolstoy, who in 1847 had entered Petersburg full of enthusiasm, and who had expressed his intention of remaining there for ever, on his return from the war was repelled by the

capital, and after a few years he was to leave it never to return. "Everything," says Grigorovich, irritated him on the banks of the Neva." Petersburg was to him the centre of whatever was most repugnant to his Russian temperament. Although he came to loathe the aggressive jingoism of the later Panславists, he had a great deal in common with the early Slavophiles, and it is significant that almost the only friends whom he preserved to the end were drawn from the Conservative camp—the poet Fet, the painter Gay, and the critic Strahof, author of a remarkable reactionary work, "The Struggle against the West" (Borba s. Zapadom).

Again, the Russian emancipation was essentially political, and Tolstoy never had any faith in purely political reforms. The Radicals were essentially Jacobins and State reformers, whilst to him the only lasting reforms were religious, moral, and economical. Other reformers have held before Tolstoy

that all political problems are in last resort ethical problems; but Tolstoy's scepticism, as we shall see, went much further—it went the length of denying the very existence of the State. *It cannot be enough emphasized that Tolstoy never possessed the political sense, and that his anarchism is the most fundamental and the most consistent part of his system.*

The watchword of the doctrinaire Radicals was “Progress.” Tolstoy is never tired of assailing the philosophy of “Progress.” He was convinced that our modern progress was progress towards destruction. He reminds one in many respects of the English Tory democrat. Like Carlyle and Ruskin, he believed that salvation lay in a return to the past. Of what use was it to abolish serfdom when we were only to substitute a new serfdom much worse than the old? The landowner at least cared for his serfs, because they were his property. The millowner has no care for the souls of his industrial serfs. The

former bond admitted of human relationship, as Tolstoy himself convincingly showed in his "Reminiscences of Childhood." The new slavery resulted in the suppression of all human relationship.

Tolstoy's attitude to the reform movement is strikingly illustrated by his relation to Turgenief. Turgenief was Tolstoy's senior by ten years, and was already the acknowledged leader of the "Intelliguenz." The two writers presented a strong contrast. Turgenief was essentially a sceptic; Tolstoy always remained an enthusiast, and was always passionately in earnest. Turgenief was negative; Tolstoy was constructive. Turgenief had a wonderful gift of humour; Tolstoy, whilst totally devoid of humour, wielded with deadly effect the weapons of irony and sarcasm. Turgenief was above all an artist, a master of language and form; Tolstoy was also a teacher and a preacher. The intellect of Turgenief was receptive to



all influences. Tolstoy's mind, with all its insight and sympathy, was intolerant of all ideas which did not agree with the opinions which he was advocating for the time being.

For a quarter of a century the two writers were in turn attracted and repelled by each other. The history of their quarrels and reconciliations is alternately tragic and grotesque. At a distance they respected and loved each other. When they were brought together, a quarrel was certain to arise and a rupture to follow. Their mutual sympathy was essentially telepathic, in direct ratio to the square of the distance. At the beginning of the Petersburg period Tolstoy was so intimate with Turgenief that he went to live at his friend's lodgings. Four years later the relations became so strained that Tolstoy challenged Turgenief to a duel. A quarter of a century before, the two greatest poets of Russia, Poushkin and Lermontof, had been killed in a similar quarrel. If Turgenief had

not had the good sense to refuse Tolstoy's challenge, the author of "Resurrection" might have been guilty of the murder of his most illustrious friend, or his own career might have come to a premature and tragic conclusion.

In the frequent quarrels between the two writers it is difficult to apportion the blame. Both men had a fiery temper and the sensitive pride characteristic of the artist. I would, however, be inclined to assume that Tolstoy was more often responsible than his rival. It is at least certain that whilst Tolstoy did not understand Turgenief, and was defiantly intolerant and sarcastic, Turgenief did understand Tolstoy; and it is equally remarkable that whilst Tolstoy generally speaks slightly of Turgenief as a writer, on the contrary no enmity ever prevented Turgenief from paying due tribute to his rival's genius. To this day the justest appreciations of Tolstoy's masterpieces are to be found in Turgenief's utterances.

Tolstoy has summed up his attitude to the reformers in his "Confession" and in the opening chapter of his unfinished novel "The Decembrists." The chapter is a long one, but it is so characteristic of the writer, and so instructive, that it is advisable to give it at full length :—

"This happened not long ago, in the reign of Alexander II., in our times of civilization, progress *problems*, rebirth of Russia, etc., etc. : the time when the victorious Russian army returned from Sevastopol which it had surrendered to the enemy ; when all Russia was celebrating the destruction of the Black Sea fleet ; and white-walled Moscow greeted, and congratulated on that auspicious event, the remainder of the crews of that fleet, offering them a good old Russian goblet of vodka, and in the good old Russian way bringing them bread and salt and bowing at their feet. This was the time when\*poli-

ticians wept over the destruction of her dream of a Te Deum in the Cathedral of St. Sophia and the deep-felt loss to the fatherland of two great men who had perished during the war (one who, carried away by impatience to hear the Te Deum referred to above, had fallen on the fields of Wallachia, not without leaving there two squadrons of Hussars; and the other an invaluable man who distributed tea, other people's money, and sheets, to the wounded without stealing any of them); in that time when from all sides, in all departments of human activity in Russia, great men sprang up like mushrooms—commanders, administrators, economists, writers, orators, and simply great men without any special calling or aim; in that time when at the jubilee of a Moscow actor, public opinion, fortified by a toast, appeared and began to punish all wrongdoers; when stern commissioners galloped from Petersburg to the south and captured, exposed, and

punished the commissariat rascals; when in all the towns dinners with toasts were given to the heroes of Sevastopol, and to those of them whose arms and legs had been torn off coppers were given by those who met them on the bridges or highways; at that time when oratorical talents were so rapidly developed among the people that one publican everywhere and on all occasions wrote, printed, and repeated by heart at dinners, such powerful speeches that the guardians of order were obliged to undertake repressive measures to subdue his eloquence; when even in the English Club in Moscow a special room was set apart for the consideration of public affairs; when periodicals appeared under the most varied banners; journals developing European basis but with a Russian world-conception, and journals on an exclusively Russian basis developing Russian principles but with a European world-conception; when suddenly so many

journals appeared that it seemed as if all possible titles had been used up: *The Messenger*, *The Word*, *The Discourse*, *The Eagle*, and many others; when nevertheless fresh titles presented themselves continually; at that time when pleiades of writer-artists, who described woods, and sunrises, and thunder, and the love of a Russian maiden, and the idleness of one official, and the misconduct of many officials; at that time when from all sides appeared problems (as in the year '56 every concourse of circumstances was called of which nobody could make head or tail); the problem of the Cader schools, the universities, the censor, oral tribunals, finance, the banks, the police, the emancipation, and many others; everybody still tried to discover new questions, and everybody tried to solve them; they wrote, and read, and talked, and drew up projects, and all wished to amend, destroy and alter, and all Russians, as one man, were in an

indescribable state of enthusiasm. That was a condition which has occurred twice in Russia in the nineteenth century: the first time was in the year '12 when we thrashed Napoleon I., and the second time was in '56 when Napoleon III. thrashed us. Great, unforgettable epoch of the rebirth of the Russian people! Like the Frenchman who said that he had not lived at all who had not lived during the great French Revolution, so I make bold to say that he who did not live in Russia in '56 does not know what life is. The writer of these lines not merely lived at that time, but was one of the workers of that period. Not merely did he personally sit for some weeks in one of the casemates of Sevastopol, but he wrote a work about the Crimean War which brought him great fame, and in which he clearly and minutely described how the soldiers in the bastion fired off their muskets, how in the hospitals people were bound up with bandages, and

how in the cemetery they were buried in the earth.

“Having performed these exploits, the writer of these lines arrived at the heart of the empire, at a rocket-station, where he reaped his laurels. He witnessed the enthusiasm of both capitals and of the whole people, and experienced in his own person how Russia can reward real service. The great ones of the earth sought his acquaintance, pressed his hands, offered him dinners, persistently invited him to come and see them, and in order to hear from him particulars about the war, narrated to him their own sensations. Therefore the writer of these lines knows how to appreciate that great and memorable time. But that is another story.”—(Aylmer Maude, I., 145-147.)

Tolstoy's chief grievance against the reformers was that they did not reform themselves. His own experiences ought to have



taught him to be more lenient in his judgments. For those years when he was judging his fellow-workers so harshly were those very years which, according to Mr. Maude, were the most dissolute of a dissolute youth. All through his sojourn in Petersburg he scandalized his least puritanic friends. We catch a glimpse of the kind of life he was leading from such an incident as the following :—

“The poet Fet, himself a young officer, made Tolstoy’s acquaintance at this time. . . . Calling on Turgenief in Petersburg, at ten o’clock one morning, he saw an officer’s sword hanging in the hall, and asked the man-servant whose it was. ‘It’s Count Tolstoy’s sword,’ replied the man. ‘He is sleeping in the drawing-room. Ivan Sergeyevich (Turgenief) is having breakfast in the study.’ During Fet’s visit of an hour’s duration, he and his host had to con-

verse in low tones for fear of waking Tolstoy. 'He is like this all the time,' said Turgenief. 'He came back from his Sevastopol battery ; put up here, and is going the pace. *Sprees, gipsy girls, and cards all night long—and then he sleeps like a corpse till two in the afternoon. At first I tried to put the brake on, but now I've given it up, and let him do as he likes.*' "

It is a proof of the solidity and the massive strength of his character that he should have emerged unscathed from those years of Bohemianism, and that the great sinner did after all become a great saint. It is true that his better nature never ceased to struggle against the animal passions and the exigencies of a sensual nature. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the experiences of his youth have left deep traces in his later philosophy of life, and notably that they are partly responsible for his conception of woman. If Tolstoy has not the

same idea of love as Carlyle or Ruskin, if he came to write the "Kreutzer Sonata," we may attribute the somewhat morbid element of his later sexual philosophy to his continued association with gipsies and prostitutes, quite as much as to the inevitable reaction following a long period of storm and stress.

It became increasingly clear to Tolstoy that marriage alone could put an end to the disorders of his tempestuous youth. For several years he was in quest of the ideal woman who would bring him peace and happiness. To the Petersburg period belongs his one serious attachment before he finally settled down. Tolstoy tells us that he discovered that the young lady was indifferent to him, and that she had carried on a flirtation with a French tutor. On the other hand he was blamed by his favourite aunt and her French governess, who declared that Tolstoy had behaved "like a pig." But



COUNT TOLSTOY AND COUNTESS TOLSTOY.



it is the privilege of a man of genius to transform even his failures and disappointments into immortal masterpieces of literary art ; and if Tolstoy's love intrigue did not result in marriage, it eventually contributed some of the autobiographical material of that wonderful gem—"Family Happiness" (1859), which, although certainly not the greatest, is probably, to use the words of Romain Rolland, the most perfect example of the writer's art.

## Chapter V

### THE END OF THE "LEHRJAHRE" AND "WANDERJAHRE"

THE nomadic instinct is inborn in every true Russian. The infinite plain seems to invite him to wander. The peasants in hundreds of thousands visit the shrines of the saints, or tramp on a pilgrimage to the Holy City. The Russian of the upper classes pays periodical visits to the health and pleasure resorts of Europe. The cultured Russian and the student frequent the seats of learning, and, having once breathed the free air of Europe, often settle as voluntary exiles.

Bohemian years Tolstoy had the

“wandering-spirit” of his race. We find it difficult to follow him in his constant journeyings between Petersburg and Moscow, between Yasnaya Polyana and the Volga, but his travels were mainly limited to the Russian Empire. Strangely enough, Europe did not attract him. Since the Turkish War, in 1854, only twice in the course of half a century did Tolstoy leave his native land.

He started on his first European tour in 1857. In Paris he saw a public execution, and this spectacle left an indelible impression on him.

“I rose at seven o’clock and drove to see an execution. A stout, white, healthy neck and breast; he kissed the Gospels, and the—death. How senseless. . . . I have not received this strong impression for naught. *I am not a man of politics.* Morals and art I know, love, and can [deal with]. The



guillotine long prevented my sleeping and obliged me to reflect."

In his "Confession" he thus summed up the impression produced by the execution :—

"When I saw the head separate from the body, and how they both thumped into the box at the same moment, I understood, not with my mind, but with my whole being, that no theory of the reasonableness of our present progress can justify this deed ; and that though everybody from the creation of the world, on whatever theory, had held it to be necessary, I know it to be unnecessary and bad ; and therefore *the arbiter of what is good and evil is not what people say and do, and is not progress, but is my heart and I.*"

In Switzerland he was deeply enraptured with the beauty of the scenery, and repelled

by the vulgarity of the tourist crowd. One characteristic episode occurred at Lucerne :—

“On July 7, 1857, in Lucerne, in front of the Schweizerhof Hotel, where the richest people stay, an itinerant mendicant singer sang songs and played his guitar for half an hour. About a hundred people listened to him. Three times the singer asked them to give him something, but not one of them did so, and many laughed at him.

“This is not fiction, but a positive fact, which any one who cares may verify by asking the permanent inhabitants of the Schweizerhof, and by looking up the newspaper lists of foreign visitors at the Schweizerhof on July 7.

“It is an event which the historians of our times should inscribe in indelible letters of fire.”

It is this incident which was drama-

tized in the short sketch, "Lucerne," which appeared in September 1857.

In August of the same year Tolstoy returned to Russia, unnoticed and disappointed.

"Petersburg at first mortified me and then put me right. My reputation has fallen and hardly gives a squeak, and I felt much hurt ; but now I am tranquil. I know I have something to say and strength to say it strongly, and the public may then say what it will. But I must work conscientiously, exerting all my powers ; then . . . let them spit upon the altar."

The whole of intellectual Russia was absorbed by the great reforms which were being elaborated ; and, as has already been noticed, Tolstoy did not feel in sympathy with the movement. There is only one reference to the serfs in one of his letters to Fet, who had

expressed his intention of buying an estate and of devoting himself to farming :—

“ Four hundred desyatins of good land with, unfortunately, seventy souls of bad serfs. But that does not matter ; they will gladly pay quitrent [in lieu of personal service] as mine do, at the rate of Rs. 30. a *tyaglo* [man and wife with an allotment of land] or Rs. 660 for the twenty-two *tyaglos*, and you will get not less than that, if not more, at the emancipation, and will have sufficient unexhausted land and meadow left to yield about Rs. 2,000 a year, or over Rs. 2,600 a year in all. The price asked for the estate is Rs. 24,000, besides a mortgage of about Rs. 5000. . . . At any rate it would be a good bargain to buy it for Rs. 20,000. . . . The seller is an old man who is ruined, and wants to sell it quickly in order to get rid of his son-in-law. He has twice sent to offer it me. The above calculation shows what the estate should yield in

a couple of years' time if about Rs. 5,000 be spent on improving it ; but even in its present condition one can answer for a return of Rs. 1,500, which is more than 7 per cent. on the cost."

It is easy to see that the writer of these lines did not realize the epoch-making importance of the emancipation of the serfs which was just preparing, and that amongst his many titles to the gratitude of posterity he cannot claim a share like Gogol, or even Turgenieff, in the most colossal and most beneficent social revolution of modern times.

In those early days, to a superficial observer, Tolstoy might have appeared as a Conservative, if not a reactionary.

When the emancipation did come, consistently with his tendency to belittle the activity of the literary reformers, Tolstoy contended that they had nothing to do with the consummation.

“ Even taking as an example the abolition of serfdom, I do not see that printing helped the solution of the problem in a progressive sense. Had the Government not said its decisive word in that affair, the press would, beyond a doubt, have explained matters in quite a different way to what it did. We saw that most of the periodicals would have demanded the emancipation of the peasants without any land, and would have produced arguments apparently just as reasonable, witty, and sarcastic [as they actually produced in favour of the more liberal solution ultimately adopted].”

The next three years were spent mainly at Moscow and Yasnaya Polyana and are probably the least eventful in Tolstoy's career. In town he appeared as a gay, fashionable young man, fond of society and music, and very particular about his dress.

But it was only in the country that he

found himself quite happy. He was addicted to every form of sport, especially to riding and hunting. It was about this time that he nearly lost his life in a bear hunt.

We have a delightful picture of his domestic life at this period, and of the long autumn and winter evenings spent at Yasnaya Polyana with his "Aunt" Tatiana :—

"He would sit in his armchair reading, thinking, and occasionally listening to her kindly and gentle conversation with two of the servants : Natalya Petrovna (an old woman who lived there, not because she was of much use, but because she had nowhere else to live) and a maid Dounetchka.

"The chief charm of that life lay in the absence of any material care ; in good relations with those nearest—relations no one could spoil ; and in the leisureliness and the unconsciousness of flying time. . . .

"When, after living badly at a neighbour's

in Toula, with cards, gipsies, hunting, and stupid vanity, I used to return home and come to her, by old habit we used to kiss each other's hand—I her dear energetic hand, and she my dirty, vicious hand ; and also by old habit we greeted one another in French, and I would joke with Natalya Petrovna, and would sit down in the comfortable armchair. She knew well all I had been doing, and regretted it, but never reproached me, retaining always the same gentleness and love. . . . I was once telling her how some one's wife had gone away with another man, and I said her husband ought to be glad to be rid of her. And suddenly my aunt lifted her eyebrows and said, as a thing long decided in her mind, that that would be wrong of the husband, because it would completely ruin his wife. After that she told me of a drama that had occurred among the serfs. Then she reread a letter from my sister Mashenka, whom she loved, if not more, at least as much as she loved



me, and she spoke of Masha's husband (her own nephew), not to condemn him, but with grief for the sorrow he inflicted on Mashenka. . . . The chief characteristic of her life, which involuntarily infected me, was her wonderful general kindness to every one without exception. I try to recall a single instance of her being angry, or speaking a sharp word, or condemning any one, and I cannot recall one such instance in the course of thirty years. She spoke well of our real aunt, who had bitterly hurt her by taking us away from her. . . . As to her kindly treatment of the servants—that goes without saying. She had grown up in the idea that there are masters and servants, but she utilized her authority only to serve them. . . . She never blamed me directly for my evil life, though she suffered on my account. My brother Sergey, too, whom she had loved warmly, she did not reproach even when he took a gipsy girl to live with him. The only

shade of disquietude she showed on our account was that, when he was very late in returning home, she would say, 'What has become of our Sergius?' Only *Sergius* instead of *Seryozha*. . . . She never told us in words how to live, never preached to us. All her moral work was done internally; externally one only saw her deeds—and not even deeds; but all her life, peaceful, sweet, submissive, and loving, not troubled or self-satisfied, but a life of quiet unobtrusive love. . . . Her affectionateness and tranquillity made her society noticeably attractive, and gave a special charm to intimacy with her. I know of no case where she offended any one, and of no one who did not love her. She never spoke of herself, never of religion or of what we ought to believe, or of how she believed or prayed. She believed everything except that she rejected one dogma,—that of eternal torment. '*Dieu, qui est la bonté même, ne peut pas vouloir nos souff-*

*frances.*' . . . She often called me by my father's name (Nicholas), and this pleased me very much, because it showed that her conceptions of me and of my father mingled in her love of us both.

"It was not her love for me alone that was joyous. What was joyous was the atmosphere of love to all who were present or absent, alive or dead, and even to animals."  
—(Aylmer Maude, I., 177, 178.)

Nicholas Tolstoy, who in those years lived a great deal with his younger brother, gives the following account of his doings :—

"Lyovotchka is zealously trying to become acquainted with peasant life and with farming, of both of which, like the rest of us, he has till now had but a superficial knowledge. But I am not sure what sort of acquaintance will result from his gymnastics. So he has rigged up a bar under his study window.

And of course, apart from prejudice, with which he wages such fierce war, he is right : gymnastics do not interfere with farming ; but the steward sees things differently, and says, ‘ One comes to the master for orders, and he hangs head downward in a red jacket, holding on by one knee to a perch, and swings himself. His hair hangs down and blows about ; the blood comes to his face, and one does not know whether to listen to his orders or to be astonished at him ! ’

“ Lyovotchka is delighted with the way the serf Ufan sticks out his arms when ploughing ; and so has become for him an emblem of village strength, like the legendary Michael ; and he himself, sticking his elbows out wide, takes to the plough.”

It is about 1859 that Tolstoy began to be keenly interested in popular education. He realized that if the political reorganization of the people were to succeed, Russia

would first have to make a start with her education. But he soon felt that as an educator he was lacking in the necessary knowledge and practical experience, and he decided to make an exhaustive study of the educational systems and policy of the leading European countries. In the beginning of 1860 he started on his second and most prolonged European tour in company with his elder brother Nicholas. The health of Nicholas Tolstoy was causing great alarm to his family. Like his brother Dimitri, Nicholas had fallen a victim to a merciless climate, and to the most universally prevalent of Russian diseases, pulmonary consumption. It was hoped that he would find a respite in the milder climate of the Riviera.

During his tour Tolstoy visited the most important educational institutions of Germany, England, and France, and became acquainted with many leaders of thought, including Auerbach, Froebel, and Proudhon,

but his investigations were soon interrupted by the illness of his brother. After a lingering and painful disease Nicholas Tolstoy died at Hyères on the 20th September 1860. Tolstoy was deeply affected by the catastrophe, and felt the loss more than any bereavement he ever suffered. His brother was a man after his own heart. All contemporary accounts agree as to the extraordinary charm possessed by the elder Tolstoy.

“The humility which Leo Tolstoy developed theoretically,” says Turgenief, “his brother actually practised in life. He always lived in the most impossible lodgings, almost hovels, somewhere in the out-of-the-way quarters of Moscow, and he willingly shared all he had with the poorest outcast. He was a delightful companion and narrator, but writing was to him almost a physical impossibility, the actual process of writing

being as difficult for him as for a labourer whose stiff hands will not hold a pen."

One month after the event Tolstoy wrote to Fet :—

"I think you already know what has happened. On the 20th September he died, literally in my arms. Nothing in my life has so impressed me. It is true, as he said, that nothing is worse than death. And when one reflects well that yet *that* is the end of all, then there is nothing worse than life. Why strive or try, since of what was Nicholas Tolstoy nothing remains ! He did not say that he felt the approach of death, but I know he watched each step of its approach, and knew with certainty how much remained. Some moments before his death he drowsed off, but awoke suddenly, and whispered with horror, 'What is that ?' That was when he saw it, the

absorption of himself into nothingness. And if he found nothing to cling to what can I find? Still less! And assuredly neither I nor any one will fight it to the last moment as he did. Two days before I said to him, 'We ought to put a *commode* in your room.'

"'No,' said he, 'I am weak, but not yet so weak as that; I will struggle on yet awhile.'

"To the last he did not yield, but did everything for himself, and always tried to be occupied. He wrote, questioned me about my writings, and advised me. But it seemed to me that he did this, not from any inner impulse, but on principle. One thing—his love of Nature—remained to the last. The day before he went into his bedroom, and from weakness fell on his bed by the open window, I came to him, and he said with tears in his eyes, 'How I have enjoyed this whole hour.'



“From earth we come, and to the earth we go. One thing is left—a dim hope that there, in Nature, of which we become part in the earth, something will remain and will be found.

“And who knew and saw his last moments, say, ‘How wonderfully, calmly, peacefully he died;’ but I know with what terrible pain, for not one feeling of his escaped me.

“A thousand times I say to myself, ‘Let the dead bury their dead.’ One must make some use of the strength which remains to one, but one cannot persuade a stone to fall upwards instead of downwards, whither it is drawn. One cannot laugh at a joke one is weary of. One cannot eat when one does not want to. And what is life all for, when to-morrow the torments of death will begin, with all the abomination of falsehood and self-deception, and will end in annihilation for oneself? An amusing thing! Be useful, be beneficent, be happy

while life lasts, say people to one another ; but you, and happiness, and virtue, and utility, consist of truth. And the truth I have learned in thirty-two years is that the position in which we are placed is terrible. ‘Take life as it is ; you have put yourselves in that position.’ How ? I take life as it is. As soon as man reaches the highest degree of development, he sees clearly that it is all nonsense and deception, and that the truth—which he still loves better than all else—is terrible. That when you look at it well and clearly, you wake with a start and say with terror, as my brother did, ‘What is that ?’

“Of course, so long as the desire to know and speak the truth lasts, one tries to know and speak. That alone remains to me of the moral world : higher than that I cannot place myself. That alone I will do, but not in the form of your art. Art is a lie, and I can no longer love a beautiful lie.

“I shall remain here for the winter because I am here, and it is all the same where one lives. Please write to me. I love you as my brother loved you, and he remembered you at his last moment.”—  
(Aylmer Maude, I., 242.)

On his return in May 1861 Tolstoy was appointed “Arbiter of the Peace.” In that capacity it was his duty to arbitrate between the landowners and the serfs, in view of the great agrarian operations which were taking place, and to facilitate by amicable arrangement the transfer of landed property from the one to the other. It is doubtful whether the appointment was a wise one, and whether the imperious manner which he retained until advancing age was conducive to conciliation. At any rate, his new functions brought him a great deal of vexation and enmity, and they resulted, after twelve months, in his discharge “for reasons of health.”

The educational experiments interrupted by his travels were resumed with renewed ardour. Schools were opened, and a school magazine was started.

The principle of Tolstoy's pedagogy, as of Rousseau's, is freedom and spontaneity. Nature has given the child a receptive mind, and that mind is instinctively eager to absorb knowledge *without any external pressure*, as the stomach is naturally eager to absorb food. If the child does not take the food we set before it, and if we are using coaxing or compulsion, we shall conclude either that the food is not good for its stomach, or that the child is unhealthy, or that it has been spoiled. Similarly, if the child's mind does not like the teaching that is set before it, and if we are to use punishments or rewards to induce it to accept the teaching, we are driven to the conclusion either that the teaching is not good for the child, or that it is abnormally backward and stupid.

The main duty of the teacher is to utilize the natural aptitude and craving for knowledge, and to give the pupil the food it can best assimilate. And the best food is the knowledge adapted to the little world in which the child moves and has its being. *All instruction should be simply a reply to questions put by the child in its daily life.* And as the questions must necessarily vary with each individual according to age, place, and circumstance, as the questions therefore must be discovered by intuition and tact and sympathy, and tested by experiment, *it follows that every school must be a pedagogical laboratory.*

It is obvious from the foregoing brief exposition that Tolstoy's political anarchism, his dread of authority and compulsion begins even at school. He does not believe in educational discipline. The only discipline he accepts is the discipline of life, the consequences, good or bad, attending our actions.

He has told us, in his own incomparably vivid way, how he tried to apply his principles to the school at Yasnaya Polyana (Aylmer Maude, I., 246-249) :—

“No one brings anything with him—neither books nor copy-books. No homework is set them. Not only do they carry nothing in their hands, they have nothing to carry even in their heads. They are not obliged to remember any lesson or any of yesterday’s work. They are not tormented by the thought of the impending lesson. They bring only themselves, the receptive nature, and an assurance that it will be as jolly in school to-day as it was yesterday. They do not think of their classes till they have begun. No one is ever scolded for being late, and they never are late, except perhaps some of the older boys, whose fathers occasionally keep them at home to do some work. In such cases the boy comes to

school running fast and panting. Until the teacher arrives, some gather at the porch, pushing one another off the steps or sliding on the ice-covered path, and some go into the rooms. When it is cold, while waiting for the master, they read, write, or play about. The girls do not mix with the boys. When the boys take any notice of the girls, they never address any one of them in particular, but always speak to them collectively: 'Hey, girls, why don't you come and slide?' or, 'Look how frozen the girls are,' or, 'Now, girls, all of you against me!'

"Suppose that by the time-table the lesson for the youngest class is elementary reading, for the second advanced reading, and for the third mathematics. The teacher enters the room, on the floor of which the boys are lying in a heap shouting, 'The heap is too small!' or, 'Boys, you're choking me!' or, 'Don't pull my hair,' etc.

“‘Peter Milaylovich,’ cries a voice from the bottom of the heap to the teacher as he enters, ‘tell them to stop!’—‘Good-morning, Peter Milaylovich!’ cry others, continuing their scrimmage. The teacher takes the books and gives them to those who have followed him to the cupboard, while from the heap of boys on the floor, those on top, still sprawling, demand books. The heap gradually diminishes. As soon as most of the boys have taken books, the rest run to the cupboard crying, ‘Me too! Me too!’ ‘Give me yesterday’s book.’ ‘Give me Koltsof,’ and so forth. If a couple of boys, excited by their struggle, still remain on the floor, those who have taken books and settled down shout at them, ‘What are you up to? We can’t hear anything. Stop it.’ The excited ones submit, and panting, take to their books; and only just at first swing their legs with unspent excitement as they sit reading. The spirit of war flies away, and the spirit of



reading reigns in the room. With the same ardour with which he pulled Mitka's hair he now reads Koltsof's works: with almost clenched teeth, with sparkling eyes, and oblivious of all around him but his book. To tear him from his reading now would need as much effort as formerly to tear him from his wrestling.

"They sit where they like: on the benches, tables, window-sills, floor, or in the armchair.

"In my opinion this external disorder is useful and necessary, however strange and inconvenient it may seem to the teacher. Of its advantages I shall have frequent occasion to speak; but of its apparent disadvantages I will say:—

"First, this disorder, or free order, only frightens us because we ourselves were educated in, and are accustomed to, something quite different. Secondly, in this as in many similar cases, coercion is used only from

hastiness or from lack of respect for human nature. We think the disorder is growing greater and greater, and that it has no limit. We think there is no way of stopping it except by force; but one need only wait a little, and the disorder (or animation) calms down of itself, and calms down into a far better and more durable order than any we could devise. . . .

“Our school evolved freely from the principles brought into it by the teachers and pupils. In spite of the predominant influence of the teacher the pupil always had the right not to go to school, and even when in school not to listen to the teacher. The teacher had the right not to admit a pupil. . . .

“Submitting naturally only to laws derived from their own nature, children revolt and rebel when subjected to your premature interference. They do not believe in the validity of your bells and time-tables and

rules. How often have I seen children fighting. The teacher rushes to separate them, and the stern teacher's presence cannot refrain from giving one another a parting blow yet more painful than its predecessors. How often, any day, do I see some Kirushka clenching his teeth, fly at Taraska, seize his hair, and throw him to the ground, apparently—though it costs him his life—determined to maim his foe; yet not a minute passes before Taraska is already laughing under Kirushka. One, and then the other, moderates his blows, and before five minutes have passed they have made friends, and off they go to sit together.

“The other day, between lessons, two boys were struggling in a corner. The one, a remarkable mathematician about ten years old, is in the second class; the other, a close-cropped lad, the son of a servant, is a clever but vindictive, tiny black-eyed lad, nicknamed Pussy. Pussy seized the mathematician's

long hair and jammed his head against the wall; the mathematician vainly clutched at Pussy's close-cropped bristles. Pussy's black eyes gleamed triumphantly. The mathematician, hardly refraining from tears, kept saying, 'Well, well, what of it?'

"I am convinced that the school should not interfere with that part of education which belongs to the family. The school should not, and has no right to, reward or punish; and the best police and administration of a school consist in giving freedom to the pupils to learn and get on among themselves as they like. I am convinced of this; and yet the customary school habits are still so strong in us that in the Yasnaya Polyana school we frequently break this rule. . . ."

Finding out by experiment the intellectual food best adapted to the needs of the children, Tolstoy comes to the conclusion that most of

the knowledge generally imparted in public or private schools is not only useless but positively noxious. Grammar is barren, and is not even conducive to correct spelling or speaking.

“ In our youngest—the third—class, they write what they like. Besides that, the youngest write out in the evening, one at a time, sentences they have composed all together. One writes, and the others whisper among themselves, noting mistakes, and only waiting till he has finished in order to denounce his misplaced ‘e’ or his wrongly detached prefix, or sometimes to perpetuate a blunder of their own. To write correctly, and to correct mistakes made by others, gives them great pleasure. The elder boys seize every letter they can get hold of, exercising themselves in the correction of mistakes, and trying with all their might to write correctly; but they cannot bear grammar or the analysis

of sentences; and in spite of a bias we had for analysis, they only tolerate it to a very limited extent, falling asleep or evading the classes."

Similarly, history has no relation to the child's life:—

"In my experience and practice the first germ of interest in history arises out of contemporary events, sometimes as a result of participation in them, through political interest, political opinions, debates, and the reading of newspapers. Consequently, the idea of beginning the teaching of history from present times should suggest itself to every intelligent teacher."

And geography is even worse than history:—

"In Von Vizin's comedy, 'The Miser,' when Mitrofanoushka was being persuaded

to learn geography, his mother said, 'Why teach him all the countries? The coachman will drive him where he may have to go to.' Nothing more to the point has ever been said against geography, and all the learned men in the world put together cannot rebut such an irrefragable argument. I am speaking quite seriously. What need was there for me to know where the river and town of Barcelona are situated, when for thirty-three years I have not once had occasion to use the knowledge? Not even the most picturesque description of Barcelona and its inhabitants could, I imagine, conduce to the development of my mental faculties."

With regard to literature Tolstoy asserts, as he was to assert thirty years later in "What is Art," that a need to enjoy art and to serve art is inherent in every human being, to whatever race or class he may belong, and that this need is legitimate and

should be satisfied. Unfortunately, the art of literature, like the art of music and of painting, does not satisfy that universal human end. Literature has been diverted from the service of the masses to the service of the classes, from the needs of the millions to the needs of a few thousands; in other words, most literature is artificial, technical, and mechanical.

The technical demands of literary art are generally justified by "the empty and stale paradox," that to understand the beautiful a preparation is necessary.

"How common it is to hear the empty and stale paradox, that to understand the beautiful a preparation is necessary. Who said so? Why? What proves it? It is only a shift, a loophole to escape from the hopeless position to which the false direction of our art, produced for one class alone, has led us. Why are the beauty of the sun and



of the human face, and the beauty of the sounds of a folk-song, and of deeds of love and self-sacrifice, accessible to every one, and why do *they* demand no preparation ? ”

The highest works of art, the most beautiful things, need no technical preparation. They make a direct and immediate appeal. The most perfect literary masterpieces are or should be universally popular, and conversely the most universally popular works of literature have, in fact, been the representative national masterpieces. The great epic poems, “The Iliad,” the “Cid,” the “Nibelungen,” do not smell of the lamp. There is nothing artificial or technical in them : they have been originally anonymous songs for the people and by the people.

In that universal appeal, in that democratic quality also lies, according to Tolstoy, the secret of the fascination and the magic spell of the Old Testament. No Protestant

preacher has ever spoken more enthusiastically on the unique beauty of the "Bible." \*

"It seems to me that the book of the childhood of the race will always be the best book for the childhood of each man. It seems to me impossible to replace that book. To alter or to abbreviate the Bible, as is done in Sonntag's and other school primers, appears to me bad. All—every word—in it is right, both as revelation and as art. Read about the creation of the world in the Bible, and then read it in an abbreviated sacred history, and the alteration of the Bible into the sacred history will appear to you quite unintelligible. The latter can only be learnt by heart; while the Bible presents the child with a vivid and majestic picture he will never forget. The omissions made in the sacred history are quite unintelligible, and only impair the character and beauty of

\* In the vocabulary of the Russian Church, the "Bible" means only the "Old Testament."

the Scriptures. Why, for instance, is the statement omitted in all sacred histories, that when there was nothing, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, and that, after having created, God looked at His creation and saw that it was good, and that then it was the morning and evening of such and such a day? Why do they omit that God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, and that, having taken one of his ribs, He with the flesh closed up the place thereof, and so forth? One must read the Bible to unperturbed children to understand how necessary and true it all is. Perhaps one ought not to give the Bible to perturbed young ladies; but when reading it to peasant children I did not alter or omit a single word. None of them giggled behind another's back, but all listened eagerly and with natural reverence. The story of Lot and his daughters, and the story of Judah's son, evoked horror but not laughter. . . .

“How intelligible and clear it all is, especially for a child, and yet how stern and serious. I cannot imagine what instruction would be possible without that book. Yet when one has learnt these stories only in childhood, and has afterwards partly forgotten them, one thinks : ‘What good do they do us ? Would it not be all the same if one did not know them at all ?’ So it seems till, on beginning to teach, you test on other children the elements that helped to develop you. It seems as if one could teach children to write and read and calculate, and could give them an idea of history, geography, and natural phenomena without the Bible, and before the Bible ; yet nowhere is this done : everywhere the child first of all gets to know the Bible, its stories, or extracts from it. The first relations of the learner to the teacher are founded on that book. Such a general fact is not an accident. My very free relations with my pupils at the commence-

ment of the Yasnaya Polyana school helped me to find the explanation of this phenomenon.

“A child or a man on entering school (I make no distinction between a ten-, thirty-, or seventy-year-old man), brings with him the special view of things he has deduced from life, and to which he is attached. In order that a man of any age should begin to learn, it is necessary that he should love learning. That he should love learning, he must recognize the falseness and insufficiency of his own view of things, and must scent afar off that new view of life which learning is to reveal to him. No man or boy would have the strength to learn, if the result of learning presented itself to him merely as a capacity to write, to read, and to reckon. No master could teach if he did not command an outlook on life higher than his pupils possess. That a pupil may surrender himself wholeheartedly to his teacher, one corner must be lifted of the veil which hides from him all

delight of that world of thought, knowledge, and poetry to which learning will admit him. Only by being constantly under the spell of that bright light shining ahead of him will the pupil be able to use his powers in the way we require of him.

“What means have we of lifting this corner of the veil? . . . As I have said, I thought as many think, that being myself in the world to which I had to introduce my pupils it would be easy for me to do this; and I taught the rudiments, explained natural phenomena, and told them, as the primers do, that the fruits of learning are sweet; but the scholars did not believe me, and kept aloof. Then I tried reading the Bible to them, and quite took possession of them. The corner of the veil was lifted, and they yielded themselves to me completely. They fell in love with the book, and with learning, and with me. It only remained for me to guide them on. . . .

“To reveal to the pupil a new world, and to make him, without possessing knowledge, love knowledge, there is no book but the Bible. I speak even for those who do not regard the Bible as a revelation. There are no other works—at least I know none—which in so compressed and poetic a form contain all those sides of human thought which the Bible unites in itself. All the questions raised by natural phenomena are there dealt with. Of all the primitive relations of men with one another: the family, State, and religion, we first become conscious through the book. The generalizations of thought and wisdom, with the charm given by their childlike simplicity of form, seize the pupil’s mind for the first time. Not only does the lyricism of David’s psalms act on the minds of the elder pupils; but more than that, from this book every one becomes conscious for the first time of the whole beauty of the epos in its incomparable sim-

plicity and strength. Who has not wept over the story of Joseph and his meeting with his brethren? Who has not, with bated breath, told the story of the bound and shorn Samson revenging himself on his enemies and perishing under the ruins of the palace he destroys, or received a hundred other impressions on which we were reared as on our mother's milk?

“Let those who deny the educative value of the Bible, and say it is out of date, invent a book and stories explaining the phenomena of Nature, either from general history or from the imagination, which will be accepted as the Bible stories are, and then we will admit that the Bible is obsolete. . . .

“Drawn though it may be from a one-sided experience, I repeat my conviction. The development of a child or a man in our society without the Bible is as inconceivable as that of an ancient Greek would have been without Homer. The Bible is the only book



to begin with for a child's reading. The Bible, both in its form and in its contents, should serve as a model for all children's primers and all reading books. A translation of the Bible into the language of the common folk would be the best book for the people." —(Aylmer Maude, I., 264-266.)

His educational labours were interrupted by ill-health. At one moment it was thought that he was threatened with the same disease which had carried off his two elder brothers. Acting on medical advice, Tolstoy underwent a systematic cure of koumyss (fermented mare's milk) in the province of Samara. The cure proved completely successful, and in the Samara district Tolstoy eventually established a second home, to which in later life he returned once a year.

In his absence the police made a raid on his house at Yasnaya Polyana. The dissatisfaction he had created as Arbiter of the

Peace, and the revolutionary character of his educational theories, had roused the suspicions of the public authorities. This visit did not increase the writer's sympathies for the Russian Government.

The first part of Tolstoy's life was now drawing to a close. On 17th September 1862 he proposed to Miss Sonia A. Behrs, the eighteen-year daughter of a German doctor, who had become naturalized in Russia. We know little about his courtship. Tolstoy, generally so expansive, is strangely reticent on this crisis of his life. We do not know whether his love for Miss Sonia Behrs had been a sudden passion, or whether the fire had been smouldering for some years. According to Romain Rolland, Tolstoy must have been in love for at least four years, because Sonia is none other than the heroine of "Family Happiness." According to Mr. Aylmer Maude, Sonia Behrs has no connection with the story, and there-

fore did not inspire what is perhaps the most perfect gem in Russian literature. Judging from analogy and intrinsic evidence, Mr. Maude is probably wrong and Mr. Rolland is probably right. But the correspondence and the Memoirs alone will finally elucidate this fascinating problem of literary history. With unusual precipitancy, as if Tolstoy were afraid lest delay might be fatal, and that the desirable consummation might not take place, one week after the engagement the marriage was celebrated. The *Lehrjahre* and *Wanderjahre* were now over, to be followed by the peaceful years of domestic happiness and artistic creation.

## Chapter VI

### MARRIAGE—"WAR AND PEACE"

THE next fifteen years, from 1863 to 1878, are the central years of Tolstoy's life, years of Titanic activity and domestic happiness. A patriarchal family was born to the writer. Thousands of acres were added to the paternal estates. His two greatest masterpieces were written, and by the end of this period Tolstoy had become the supreme writer of his race.

His marriage was indeed a dangerous experiment. Men of genius, at best, are proverbially bad husbands, and Tolstoy, of all men, did not seem to have it in him to make a good husband. For a man of his impetuous and masterful temperament, with a doubtful past behind him, to marry a girl of eighteen—

that is, about half his age—seemed, indeed, to court disaster.

He was almost morbidly conscious of the danger he was running, and that is the reason why he delayed so long to take a step which he had been contemplating for many years. Even if Tolstoy had not already passed the age of illusions, no man in the matter of love and marriage ever was less carried away by sentiment. He had an instinctive dislike towards novelists like George Sand, who deceive the inexperienced and who distort reality on one of the most fateful problems of life, and who invariably make a romantic idyll of what is generally a commonplace failure or a tragic comedy. In this connection one might point out that, in the whole of Tolstoy's works, there is not one marriage which may be called ideal. Prince André fails both in his marriage with Lisa and in his courtship with Natasha. Pierre fails in his marriage with Helen Kouragine. Even

the model husband and model wife, Levine and Nicholas Rostof, only reach the harbour after one or more failures. Even their union is full of disappointments and misunderstandings. In the later stories, in "Ivan Ilyitch" and the "Kreutzer Sonata," it is the tragic view of marriage which almost universally prevails.

Marriage, so far from being an idyll and a romance, is to Tolstoy the most serious and fateful step in a man's life, and the possibilities of failure are incomparably greater than the probabilities of success. The one foundation of success is a love based, not on ignorance or illusion, but on the firm rock of knowledge and experience.

It was probably to guard himself against the dangers of illusion and romance that Tolstoy wrote "Family Happiness," even as Goethe wrote the "Sorrows of Werther." Whether Sonia Behrs has or has not any relation to the heroine of the story, one thing

is certain : when Tolstoy wrote it, his mind was already bent on marriage. In my interpretation, "Family Happiness" is not so much a story based on a past episode in Tolstoy's life, but rather a hypothesis and anticipation of what his own marriage might probably be. And it was also to guard himself against the danger of an ill-assorted union, and against the possibility of misunderstanding, that Tolstoy, like the hero of "Family Happiness," took the heroic and brutal decision of communicating to his future wife his private diary containing the detailed history of his wild and "wasted" years.

It is partly because Tolstoy's marriage was based on the foundation of absolute truthfulness that this adventurous union did not prove a total failure—at least during the first ten years.\* But it was also because

\* The unpublished correspondence and private diaries will reveal that the misunderstandings between Tolstoy and his wife began much earlier than is generally supposed, and that they poisoned the last thirty years of his life.

Countess Tolstoy was an extraordinary woman. She possessed in a large measure her husband's strength of intellect and character, and she also possessed many of the qualities in which he was most deficient, and which were most needed in her difficult position. She was not only to him a devoted and sympathetic wife, but she was a tactful adviser and a methodical and skilful manager.

Even from a literary point of view, so far from being an obstacle to his artistic activity, she was a valuable helpmate. By her business-like qualities she compensated for his unbusiness-like ways, and probably many times saved him from financial ruin. She took upon herself all the material preoccupations of life. She was his indefatigable secretary and amanuensis. It is said that she rewrote seven times the whole of "War and Peace." Alone she could decipher his manuscript—no mean achievement, for Tolstoy's



writing is only surpassed in unreadableness by that of Napoleon.

The harmonious relations between husband and wife were all the more remarkable because Countess Tolstoy did not at all share her husband's views ; neither had her upbringing nor her temperament fitted her for her delicate task. Essentially practical, she had little of the idealism and enthusiasm of Tolstoy. . Cultured and refined, an expert painter, she fully appreciated and enjoyed the artifices of our degenerate civilization, and she did not appreciate the simple life which she eventually was asked to practise. Those differences of views must have brought about many a misunderstanding from the very beginning, but Count and Countess Tolstoy agreed to differ. It is only in later years, as the rift widened, that the situation became increasingly difficult, until during the three last decades of his life the breach became complete and the position intolerable.

But for the present the difficulties were still hidden in the womb of destiny, and sufficient for the day was the bliss thereof. In the meantime Tolstoy was living his life with that capacity of enjoyment which he retained to his extreme old age. We can picture the young couple during those years, from the exquisite idyll in the second part of "Anna Karenina," describing the country life of Levine.

Tolstoy had given up his magazine and his school on the pretence, uncritically accepted by Prince Kropotkin, that Government interference prevented him from carrying out his schemes. But the truth was that he was too much absorbed in his home, and that he was already "girding his loins" for a more ambitious literary venture.

The conception of "War and Peace" must be placed very shortly after his marriage. He had originally intended to write a historical novel on the Decembrist con-

spiracy, the abortive revolutionary plot after the death of Alexander I., but his preliminary research into that period carried him back to the Napoleonic wars, and he at once realized, with the divination of the artist, that here was the subject for a great national epic. What still further attracted him was that the subject was identified with the chronicles of his own family, and that he would thus be able to the full to indulge his autobiographical bent. The heroic traditions of the war were still vivid at Yasnaya Polyana, and Tolstoy felt that here he was on safe and solid ground.

He set at once to work. The "spade-work" and preliminary labours were formidable. He had to master an overwhelming mass of contemporary evidence. He explored the battlefields of 1812; he visited the museums and archives; he read memoirs and family histories. Any one who has happened to study those stirring times will find

ample evidence of the extensive nature of Tolstoy's investigations, and will discover such evidence in the most unexpected directions.

Some time ago I was reading the correspondence of Joseph de Maistre, who was, during the war, ambassador of the King of Sardinia to Petersburg. In one letter I recognized a vivid passage which I had admired in "War and Peace." Tolstoy had incorporated the contemporary document in his novel, as Shakespeare has almost literally transcribed a passage of Montaigne in "The Tempest." Only men of genius are guilty of such plagiarism.

It would be hardly accurate to call "War and Peace" a romance, for every detail is drawn from real life. Every character is either a historic personality or a family portrait, painted with Rembrandt-like minuteness. The only difference between the historical characters and the fictitious is this,

that the real historical characters impress us as by far the less real of the two, because Tolstoy necessarily possesses a less intimate and less personal acquaintance with them.

In his unfair but illuminating book on Tolstoy, Merejkovsky makes the absurd statement that "War and Peace" as a historical novel is a conspicuous failure. The errors and absurdities of a man of genius like Merejkovsky are more instructive than the commonplaces of mediocrities, and there is an important element of truth in Merejkovsky's criticism which has been generally overlooked. The criticism probably expresses the writer's sense of the deeper reality, and therefore of the artistic superiority of Tolstoy's *Dichtung* over his *Wahrheit*. "War and Peace" once more illustrates the truth and meaning of Aristotle's aphorism, that poetry is more true than history—that is to say, that poetry is not only more beautiful, or more exciting,

but that it has a deeper reality. For exactly the same reason Tolstoy, feeling with his infallible instinct how impossible it was for mere history to compete with poetry, has not repeated the artistic error so often made by Sir Walter Scott. The German historian Ranke has pointed out that the character of Louis XI. in "Quentin Durward" is not true to facts. And the mistake is all the more serious because Louis XI., all through the novel, occupies the foreground. In "War and Peace," on the contrary, the chief historical actors, Alexander and Napoleon, are deliberately kept in the background, and are only depicted in a few vivid outlines. The only historical character who forms an exception, and of whom a full-length portrait is given, is the commander-in-chief, Koutousof. But the explanation is that Koutousof, even in actual history, is an enigmatic character. Therefore the imagination of Tolstoy is left un-

trammelled, and he is enabled to represent Koutousof, not as the conventional great strategist, which he was not, but as the typical Russian soldier who trusted to Providence to fight his battles, and who generally abstained from interfering himself.

Even as in "Anna Karenina," three or more plots are worked out in combination—the fortunes of the Rostof, of the Bolkonsky, of the Kouragin. Tolstoy never did believe in the traditional laws of classical unity. Life is too complex to conform to the conventions of the classical ideal, and art must reproduce the complexity of real life. Artistic genius will reveal itself, not in the simplification, or rather in the mutilation of reality, but in the skilful handling and grouping of the characters in their mutual interdependence and conflict.

The fortunes of nations are interwoven with the private fortunes of families; and, as he is supreme in the anatomy of indi-

vidual character, Tolstoy is no less a master in describing great historical movements and corporate actions: the movement of an army, the incidents of a battle, a secret gathering of freemasons, the deliberations of statesmen, the conversation of a society drawing-room.

The chief secret of Tolstoy's magic is the divine gift of a sympathetic imagination. Sympathy with his subject always was to him a condition of inspiration. Unless and until he got into close sympathy, he felt he could not proceed with his work. For that very reason he did dismiss many subjects which he had already been investigating. He rejected a projected novel on Peter the Great because the man and the epoch were repellent to him. He rejected the "Decembrists" because his soul was not attuned to the doctrinaire liberalism of the conspirators.

When one reads "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina" one does wonder that Tolstoy should have condemned any sub-



ject or any group of men merely for lack of sympathy, for in those two great novels the range of his sympathies seems wellnigh universal. It seems as if his varied personal experiences, his struggles and temptations, had given him the key which opened every human heart. In "War and Peace" the younger generation and the old, the prince and the peasant, the sceptic and the believer, the soldier and the diplomat, the court and the camp, are all revealed by the touch of the magician's wand. Every character acts his own part, and speaks his own language, and is placed exactly in those positions which will bring out his individuality.

Although the divine gift of imagination and insight is the true secret of Tolstoy's art, yet he is never misled by his sympathies into idealizing his characters. He no more falls in love with Sonia or Natasha than the sculptor falls in love with his statue. He holds even the balance of poetic justice. He

has the impersonality, the detachment, of the supreme artist. He shows the weakness as well as the strength of his heroes and heroines. Indeed to him there are no heroes nor heroines: they only appear as frail suffering human beings, with their loves and hatreds, their schemings and strivings, their hopes and disappointments.

As the novel proceeds, the didactic element becomes stronger. It seems, as the tragedy deepens, as if it did teach Tolstoy, as it taught Bezoukhof, its solemn lessons, its fateful message. The atmosphere of the novel changes from the frivolous conversations at the beginning in the salon of Mdlle. Scherer, to the heroic sacrifices at the end. But the marvellous thing is that the didactic tendency never interferes with action or character. Tolstoy may give us his own theories at the end or at the beginning of a chapter; but he does not allow his characters to expound their theories, as Tacitus

or Thucydides used the orations of their heroes to develop their philosophic conclusions. Tolstoy never pulls wires: he always remains objective, and when he wants to sum up his philosophy of life he transfers it to a distinct epilogue, as the Greek poet put his chorus at the end of his tragedy. The philosophic disquisition which forms the conclusion of "War and Peace" is so independent and separate from the novel that in many editions it is entirely left out.

With the truth or the falsehood of the historical theories we are not here concerned; it is of more importance to understand their relation to Tolstoy's scheme of life, and to realize how deeply they are rooted in his personality. They are especially interesting in the light of ulterior developments.

sculpted individual, however supreme, does not hold even. History, tactics and strategy,

politics and diplomacy, are only a solemn tragi-comedy. Plans of campaign only exist on paper. Napoleon did not fight his own battles. It is the Russian people that fought them, and the Russian people themselves are only instruments of those mysterious forces which unbelievers call "Fate," and which believers call "Providence."

In the anarchism which ignores the State and the statesman we recognize the democratic conception of history with which Count Tolstoy subsequently identified himself. Equally significant are the other characteristics of the epic: the attitude to woman, the disconsolate view of marriage, and, above all, the mental anguish, the pessimism, which foreshadow the conversion of later years.

After "War and Peace" there was a pause in the creative activity. To that wonderful organization "rest" was not ces-

sation from work, but the substitution of one form of work for another. Where the artist ceased the teacher and preacher began.

The summer of 1869 was devoted to philosophical studies. The following letter is of great importance, because it shows the far-reaching influence of Schopenhauer, and because it also proves *that already, in 1869, about ten years before the final crisis, the philosophy of despair of the German thinker found an immediate and an enthusiastic response in Tolstoy's soul :—*

“Do you know what this summer has been for me? An unceasing ecstasy over Schopenhauer, and a series of mental enjoyments such as I never experienced before. I have bought all his works, and have read and am reading them (as well as Kant's). And assuredly no student in his course has learnt so much and discovered so much as I





THE LAKE, YASNAYA POLYANA.

have during this summer. I do not know whether I shall ever change my opinion, but at present I am confident *that Schopenhauer is the greatest genius among men*. You said he had written something or other on philosophic subjects. What do you mean by 'something' or 'other'? It is the whole world in an extraordinary vivid and beautiful reflection. I have begun translating him. Won't you take up that work? We would publish it together. After reading him I cannot conceive how his name can remain unknown. The only explanation is the one he so often repeats, that except idiots there is scarcely any one else in the world. . . ."

Tolstoy resumed his early educational labours, and reopened his school. No man deserved more fully the praise which Wordsworth gives to Milton:—

"His soul the humblest duties on itself did lay."



For years he devoted himself to the elaboration of a popular reader. Humble as seems the purpose of the book, suggested by the title ("A B C"), it proved an epoch not merely in popular education, but in the history of Russian literature. Less ambitious than his first educational attempts, the "A B C" Reader is far more definite, and proved far more valuable, and it indirectly opened to the writer a new field of literary activity.

In his earliest experiments as a teacher Tolstoy had often felt the want of a suitable reading-book for the people. The current literature only catered for the few. When men of letters did choose to address themselves to the many, they did not minister to their needs: they only pandered to their lowest tastes. What was wanted was a literature both ennobling and truly popular. But Tolstoy realized that the only literature which the people could understand was the

literature which they themselves had written. That literature existed in the Folk-Songs and Folk-Tales—a literature of infinite wealth—and it had the same relation to the conventional masterpieces which the lilies of the field have to the flowers of a hot-house. Tolstoy set himself to collect these buried treasures of the people. He gathered stories from the mouth of the peasant and from the primitive poetry of mankind. Elaborating and working out the original material which he had thus collected, he wrote a selection of popular tales, beginning with the admirable “Prisoner of the Caucasus” in 1872, and ending thirty-three years later with “Esarhaddon” and “Korney Vasilyef.” These stories alone would have insured to his name an undying place amongst the spiritual benefactors of his people. Happy the writer whose genius can thus provide the spiritual food of the educated thousands and of the inarticulate millions !

His study of primitive literature had brought him into close touch with the poetry of Greece. At the age of forty he set himself to study ancient Greek, and he threw himself into that study with his usual enthusiasm.

“I received your letter a week ago, but have not answered, because from morning to night I am learning Greek. I am writing nothing, only learning; and to judge by information reaching me through Borisof, your skin (to be used as parchment for my diploma in Greek) is in some danger. Improbable and astounding as it may seem, I have read Xenophon, and can now read him at sight. For Homer a dictionary and some effort is still necessary. I eagerly await a chance of showing this new trick to some one. But how glad I am that God sent this folly upon me! In the first place, I enjoy it; and secondly, I have become

convinced that of all that human language has produced truly beautiful and simply beautiful I knew nothing (like all the others who know but do not understand); and thirdly, because I have ceased to write, and never more will write, wordy rubbish. I am guilty of having done so; but, by God, I won't do it any more. Explain to me, for Heaven's sake, why no one knows Æsop's fables, or even delightful Xenophon, not to mention Plato and Homer, whom I still have before me? In so far as I can as yet judge, our translations, made on German models, only spoil Homer. To use a banal but involuntary comparison, they are like boiled and distilled water, while he is like water fresh from the spring, striking the teeth with its sunlit sparkle; even its specks only making it seem still clearer and fresher. . . . You may triumph; without knowledge of Greek, there is no education. But what kind of knowledge? How is it to be

got? What is the use of it? To this I have replies clear as daylight.”—(Aylmer Maude, I., 327-328.)

We are told in this letter that “without a knowledge of Greek there is no education.” Forty years later Tolstoy assailed with his sarcasm the worshippers of the Greek art, who held “that the very best that can be done by the art of nations after nineteen hundred years of Christian teaching is to choose as the ideal of life the ideal held by a small, semi-savage, slave-holding people who lived two thousand years ago, imitated the nude human body extremely well, and erected buildings pleasant to look at.”

Having overtaxed his strength he went to the Volga, where he had recently acquired extensive estates.

Whilst he was recuperating, the district was visited by one of those famines which are

a periodical infliction in Russia, as they are of India. For the first time the problem of poverty was brought home to him. For months he worked indefatigably for the relief of the famine-stricken population. The subscription started by Tolstoy ultimately produced over £270,000. But he soon realized that no temporary cure could cope with an evil of such magnitude, and that the cause of the evil lay not in the accidental failure of the crops, but in the distribution of land and wealth. From that day the economic problem began to force itself on his attention. It was to make him eventually into an apostle of Henry George, and was one day to lead him to advocate those very political reforms which, during the greater part of his life, he declared to be futile.

The "A B C" Reader had cost him three years of strenuous labour. The completion of "Anna Karenina"—the greatest novel of the world's literature—only took two

years. Like many a literary masterpiece it owed its conception to an accident.

“The year before, a lady named Anna, who lived with Bibikof, a neighbouring squire, had committed suicide by throwing herself under a train, out of jealousy of Bibikof’s attentions to their governess. Tolstoy knew all the details of the affair, and had been present at the post-mortem. This supplied him with a theme ; but it was not till March 1873, and then, as it were, by accident, that he actually began to write the book. A volume of Poushkin happened one day to lie open at the commencement of ‘A Fragment,’ which begins with the words, ‘The guests had arrived at the country house.’ Tolstoy chanced to see the book, and remarked to those present that this, plunging at once into the midst of things, is a model of how a story should begin. Some one then laughingly suggested that he should begin a novel in that

way ; and Tolstoy at once started on ‘ Anna Karenina,’ the second sentence and first narrative sentence of which is, ‘ All was in confusion in the Oblonskys’ house.’ ”— (Aylmer Maude, I., 345.)

Like every great novel of Balzac, and every great drama of Shakespeare, “ Anna Karenina ” is pre-eminently a tragedy of passion. It shows the all-consuming fire of one overmastering feeling, which ignores every law and convention, until the individual is crushed by the relentless action of the very laws which he ignores or transgresses. And, like Balzac and Shakespeare, Tolstoy refrains from superficial and cheap moralizing. He does not preach a sermon from a text. Yet, if ever writer was in danger of writing with a purpose, and of making his heroes and heroines the mouthpieces of his theories, Tolstoy was that writer. For no man ever was animated with more ardent convictions.



But by some miraculous dissociation or double personality the artist and the teacher are always kept separate, and the artist often expresses thoughts and feelings which the teacher does not know of or disapproves of. He lets life teach its own lesson—if, indeed, its lessons are not beyond our shallow interpretations. For although in the case of Anna Karenina herself transgression does bring with it its own retribution, yet generally in the novel guilt is not attended with punishment, and virtue is not attended by rewards. The wicked are not unhappy, and the virtuous are not happy, nor are they even generally pleasant or sympathetic. Dolly Oblonsky is a model wife and mother, yet she has a wretched life. Her husband, Stiva, is a wicked sinner. Yet he is always smiling and cheerful and he is popular with all. Vronsky, the seducer, appears as a perfect gentleman. Yet he escapes morally unhurt. Indeed it might be held that he is himself

made better by his love for Anna. His life becomes nobler, his character more earnest. It is Anna Karenina alone who is singled out by Destiny to be the sufferer and victim.

It is one of the essential principles of Tolstoy's favourite teacher, Schopenhauer, that human character remains unaltered from the cradle to the grave, and the identity of individual character is also one of the canons of the classical drama. On the contrary, in the novels of Tolstoy, character grows and is built up by circumstances. In "War and Peace" Natasha, the wife of Pierre, is very different from the impulsive and thoughtless girl seduced by the good looks of Anatole Kouragin. Princess Marie Bolkonsky as a wife has none of the weakness and meekness which she shows as a daughter. The same process of growth strikes us in "Anna Karenina." It is only the frivolous or superficial, like Prince Stiva and the doctrinaire brother of Levine, that do

not change. All the other characters, Kitty and Dolly, Levine and Vronsky, Anna and her husband, are all gradually transformed by the joys and sorrows, the strivings and struggles of life.

“Anna Karenina” ranks with “Francesca di Rimini,” with “Phêdre,” with “Manon Lescaut,” with “Gretchen,” as one of the great lovers in literature. Till the end Anna casts a spell over the reader, and holds his sympathies. We are not asked to judge but to pity. Her character is a wonderfully subtle combination of contradictions. At the beginning of the novel she appears as the peacemaker, yet she is fated to destroy the peace of all that surround her. She is supremely natural and simple, and that simplicity is part of her charm. Yet she lives amidst the most artificial surroundings. She is pre-eminently truthful, yet she is compelled to live in an atmosphere of lies. She has got to hate her husband, yet she refuses to

regain her liberty by divorce. Her devotion to her boy is her supreme resource in suffering, yet it is that very devotion which distracts her, and which is one of the causes that drive her to madness and suicide.

The character of her husband is also a triumph of art. In Professor Faguet's judgment he is the most perfect creation of the novel. He is the glorified type of the official mind. An honest man and a gentleman, he is steeped in respectability and conventional morality, and he generally mistakes social formulas for moral principles. But the bureaucrat nevertheless has a human soul, which reveals itself in suffering. In the hour of crisis, at the sickbed of the guilty wife, he rises to sublime greatness, and fulfils with childlike submission and simplicity the divine law of mercy.

"Anna Karenina" is the masterpiece of Tolstoy, and one of the mountain peaks of the world's literature. Supremely great as is

“War and Peace,” “Anna Karenina” is far greater. The art is more subtle and more restrained, the emotion is deeper, though more subdued. There is a more tragic conception of life. The theme is more universal : it is not one of purely historical interest, and it deals with the eternal problems of humanity.

## Chapter VII

### TOLSTOY'S CONVERSION

**T**OLSTOY had just finished publishing "Anna Karenina." He had just reached the fullness of his power. His influence had attained its zenith in Russia, and was gradually extending to other countries. Suddenly the world was startled by the news that he had been touched by grace, that he was burning as vain idols the ideals which he had once worshipped, and that he was bent on renouncing the art which had made his name illustrious. The anatomist of passion, and love was henceforth to condemn all love but the love of Christ, and the love of neighbour for the sake of Christ. The most successful painter of high life in literature

was henceforth only to extol the simple life. The possessor of vast estates, the father of a patriarchal family in the height of prosperity, was henceforth to glorify renunciation, and, a new St. Francis of Assisi, he was embracing poverty.

To a Frenchman or an Englishman such a crisis may well have come as a shock, but not so to a Russian. A similar crisis had happened in the life of many a Russian writer before Tolstoy and after him. Gogol, the father of the Russian novel, the author of the greatest Russian comedy, had spent the latter part of his life in mystic contemplation. Dostoievsky, whose fame and influence eventually almost came to rival the fame and influence of Tolstoy, and whose "Crime and Punishment" is only second in power to "Anna Karenina," surrendered the liberal and progressive principles for which he had suffered exile and imprisonment in Siberia, and became a pious son of the Church and a

loyal subject of the Tsar. Vladimir Solovioff, the most powerful thinker Russia has produced, became converted to the Roman Catholic ideal, and spent the last years of a brief and brilliant career in trying to bring about the reunion of Greek orthodoxy to the Roman Catholic Church.

The Russian temperament is more extreme and more impulsive than the Western temperament. Religious ideals take firmer hold in Russia than in any other country. No one who has closely observed the religious life of the Russian peasantry, no one who has spent a few days with Russian pilgrims at Kieff or Jerusalem, will doubt that the Russian people are to-day the most Christian nation in the world. Their soul seems to come nearer to the simple truth of the Gospel, and it is more nearly attuned to the doctrine of renunciation. The Russian people seem more disposed to make sacrifices for what they believe to be the truth. In Russia the age of



martyrs is not closed. Every class, every sex, every age, has had its sufferers for the ideal. In hundreds and thousands Russians have given up their lives in our generation, whether in the cause of Nihilism and atheism or in the cause of Christianity.

To the Russian mind, the so-called "conversion" of Tolstoy must, therefore, not have appeared as anything extraordinary. Nor was it astonishing that it should have happened at the period of life which Tolstoy was then reaching. The religious crisis was only the reaction after fifteen years of Titanic production.\* After a period of creation there succeeded a period of contemplation. Tolstoy could survey the chequered experiences of the past. He could see how all his illusions and ideals had vanished at the touch of reality. Art had revealed to him the awful tragedy of passion. Political history had revealed to

\* Compare my article on the Unity of Tolstoy's life and philosophy in the *Contemporary Review*, January 1911.

him the hollowness of the doctrinaire ideals of progress and reform. Terrorism was rife and rampant around him; the Nihilist plots were thickening, and were to culminate in the assassination of the Liberator Tsar. Nothing short of the religious ideal could satisfy his passionate soul hungering for perfection, his restless mind thirsting for peace.

I do not agree with Mr. Aylmer Maude (I., 393) in believing that the conversion of Tolstoy was mainly "intellectual," as was, for instance, the conversion of Cardinal Newman, and that it was accomplished rather at the prompting of the brain than at the prompting of the heart. The intellect did not provide one single argument which Tolstoy had not examined and thrashed out for twenty years. The conversion, as in the case of St. Augustine and Pascal, whose "Thoughts" became one of his favourite manuals, went far deeper than the intellect. It was essentially a conversion of the will. It was emotional, constitutional,

temperamental, vital. The heart provided reasons which reason knew not of. So little was Tolstoy's conversion an "intellectual" one, that his main endeavour was to discard the intellectual and dogmatic and metaphysical superstructure of religion, and to retain only the moral teaching. It is true that later on, when the great crisis was well over, when the first spiritual fever had cooled down, Tolstoy's restless intellect did interfere to disintegrate or weaken some of the religious beliefs which had been built up. But before and during the crisis, the intellect, with its marvellous power of lucid vision, only provided an analysis of the spiritual processes or vital motives of the conversion, *but those processes and motives existed quite independently of the analysis.*

We are now in a position critically to examine Tolstoy's own account of his "conversion." His "Confession" will occupy in world literature a place not far below that of

the "Confessions of Saint Augustine," of which again and again we are reminded, rather than of the "Confessions" of Rousseau, in the psychological subtlety, the intellectual power, the systematic self-depreciation and humility, and the tragic earnestness. It is necessary to give at full length, in Tolstoy's own words, the analysis of the spiritual processes he passed through, as those pages of the "Confession" provide the key to his life and work.\*

Five years ago something very strange began to happen to me. At first I experienced moments of perplexity and arrest of life, as though I did not know how to live or what to do ; and I felt lost, and became dejected. But this passed, and I went on living as before. Then these moments of perplexity began to recur oftener and oftener, and always in the same form. They were always expressed by the question : What's it for ? What does it lead to ?

At first it seemed to me that these were aimless

\* I have utilized.

and irrelevant questions. I thought that it was all well known, and that if I should ever wish to deal with the solution, it would not cost me much effort ; just at present I had no time for it, but when I wanted to I should be able to find the answer. The questions, however, began to repeat themselves frequently, and more and more insistently to demand replies ; and like drops of ink always falling on one place, they ran together into one dark blot.

That occurred which happens with every one sickening with a mortal internal disease. At first trivial signs of indisposition appear, to which the sick man pays no attention ; then these signs reappear more and more often, and merge into one uninterrupted period of suffering. The suffering increases, and before the sick man can look round, what he took for a mere indisposition has already become more important to him than anything else in the world—it is death.

That was what happened to me. I understood that it was no casual indisposition, but something very important, and that if these questions constantly repeated themselves it would be necessary to answer them. And I tried to do so. The questions seemed such stupid, simple, childish questions ; but as soon as I touched them and

tried to solve them I at once became convinced (1) that they are not childish and stupid, but the most important and the deepest of life's questions; and (2) that, try as I would, I could not solve them. Before occupying myself with my Samara estate, the education of my son, or the writing of a book, I had to know *why* I was doing it. As long as I did not know why, I could do nothing and could not live. Amid the thoughts of estate management which greatly occupied me at that time, the question would suddenly occur to me: "Well, you will have 16,000 acres of land in Samara Government and 300 horses, and what next?" . . . And I was quite disconcerted, and did not know what to think. Or, beginning to consider my plans for educating my children, I would say to myself, "What for?" Or, when considering how the peasants might be prosperous, I suddenly said to myself, "But what business is it of mine?" Or, when thinking of the fame my works would bring me, I said to myself, "Very well, you will be more famous than Gogol or Poushkin or Shakespeare or Molière, or than all the writers in the world—and what does it lead to?" And I could find no reply at all. The questions would not wait; they had to be answered at once, and if one did not answer them

it was impossible to live. But there was no answer.

I felt that what I had been standing on had broken down, and that I had nothing left under my feet. What I had lived by no longer existed, and I had nothing left to live by.

My life came to a standstill. I could breathe, eat, drink, and sleep, and I could not help doing these things ; but there was no life, for there were no wishes the fulfilment of which I could consider reasonable. . . . Had a fairy come and offered to fulfil my desires, I should not have known what to ask. . . . If in moments of intoxication I felt something which I cannot call a wish, but a habit left by former wishes, in sober moments I knew this to be a delusion, and that there is really nothing to wish for. I could not even wish to know the truth, for I guessed in what it consisted. The truth was that life is meaningless. I had, as it were, lived, lived and walked, walked till I had come to a precipice, and saw clearly that there was nothing ahead of me but destruction. It was impossible to stop, impossible to go back, and impossible to close my eyes or avoid seeing that there was nothing ahead but suffering and real death—complete annihilation.

It had come to this, that I, a healthy, fortunate

man, felt I could no longer live ; some irresistible power impelled me to rid myself one way or other of life. I cannot say I *wished* to kill myself. The power which drew me away from life was stronger, fuller, and more widespread than any mere wish.

The thought of self-destruction now came to me as naturally as thoughts of how to improve my life had come formerly. And it was so seductive that I had to be wily with myself lest I should carry it out too hastily. "If I cannot unravel matters there will always be time." And it was then that I, a man favoured by fortune, hid a cord from myself lest I should hang myself from the crosspiece of the partition in my room, where I undressed alone every evening ; and I ceased to go out shooting with a gun lest I should be tempted by so easy a way of ending my life. I did not myself know what I wanted. I feared life, desired to escape from it ; yet still hoped something of it.

And all this befell me at a time when all around me I had what is considered complete good fortune. I was not yet fifty ; I had a good wife who loved me, and whom I loved ; good children, and a large estate which without much effort on my part improved and increased. I was respected



by my relations and acquaintances more than at any previous time. I was praised by others, and without much self-deception could consider that my name was famous. And not only was I not insane or mentally unwell; on the contrary, I enjoyed a strength of mind and body such as I have seldom met with among men of my kind: physically I could keep up with the peasants at mowing, and mentally I could work continuously for eight to ten hours without experiencing any ill results from such exertion. . . .

My mental condition presented itself to me in this way: my life is some stupid and spiteful joke some one has played on me. Though I did not acknowledge a "some one" who created me, yet that form of representation—that some one had played an evil and stupid joke on me by placing me in the world—was the form of expression that came most naturally to me. . . .

There is an Eastern fable, told long ago, of a traveller overtaken in a plain by an enraged beast. Escaping from the beast he leaps into a dry well, but at the bottom of the well sees that a dragon has opened its jaws to swallow him. And the unfortunate man, not daring to climb out lest he should be destroyed by the enraged beast, and not daring to leap to the bottom of the well lest he

should be eaten by the dragon, seizes a twig growing in a crack in the well and clings to it. His hands are growing weaker, and he feels he will soon have to resign himself to the destruction that awaits him above or below ; but still he clings on. And he sees that two mice, a black and a white one, go regularly round and round the stem of the twig to which he is clinging, and gnaw at it. And soon the twig itself will snap, and he will fall into the dragon's jaws. The traveller sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish ; but while still hanging he looks around and finds some drops of honey on the leaves of the twig, and reaches them with his tongue and licks them. So I too clung to the twig of life, knowing that the dragon of death was inevitably awaiting me, ready to tear me to pieces ; and I could not understand why I had fallen into such torment. And I tried to lick the honey which formerly consoled me ; but the honey no longer gave me pleasure, and the white and black mice of day and night gnawed at the branch by which I hung. I saw the dragon clearly, and the honey no longer tasted sweet. And this is not a fable, but the real unanswerable truth intelligible to all.

The deception of the joys of life which formerly allayed my terror of the dragon now no longer deceives me. No matter how much I may be

told, "You cannot understand the meaning of life, so do not think about it, but live," I can no longer do it; I have already done it too long. I cannot now help seeing day and night going round and bringing me to death. That is all I see, for that alone is true. All else is false.

The two drops of honey which diverted my eyes from the cruel truth longer than the rest—my love of family and of writing, art as I called it—were no longer sweet to me.

Family . . . said I to myself. But my family—wife and children—are also human. They too are placed as I am; they must either live in a lie, or see the terrible truth. Why should they live? Why should I love them, guard them, bring them up, or watch them? That they may come to the despair that I feel, or else be stupid? Loving them, I cannot hide the truth from them; each step in knowledge leads them to that truth. And the truth is death.

"Art, poetry?" . . . I soon saw that that too was a fraud. It was plain to me that art is an adornment to life, an allurements to life. But life had lost its attraction for me; so how could I attract others? As long as I was not living my own life, but some other life bore me on its waves—as long as I believed that life had a meaning, though one

I could not express, the reflection of life in poetry and art of all kinds afforded me pleasure; it was pleasant to look at life in the mirror of art. But when I began to seek the meaning of life, and felt the necessity of living on my own account, that mirror became for me unnecessary, superfluous, ridiculous, or painful. I could no longer soothe myself with what I saw in the mirror, for what I saw was, that my position was stupid and desperate. It was all very well to enjoy the sight, when in the depth of my soul I believed that my life had a meaning. Then the play of lights—comic, tragic, touching, beautiful, and terrible—in life amused me. But when I knew life to be meaningless and terrible, the play in the mirror could no longer amuse me. No sweetness of honey could be sweet to me when I saw the dragon, and saw the mice gnawing away my support. . . .

The question which at the age of fifty brought me to the verge of suicide was the simplest of questions lying in the soul of every man, from the foolish child to the wisest elder. It was a question without answering which one cannot live, as I had found by experience. It was, What will come of what I am doing to-day, or shall do to-morrow? What will come of my whole life? . . .

Where philosophy does not lose sight of the

essential question, its answer is always one and the same, an answer given by Socrates, Schopenhauer, Solomon, and Buddha.

"We approach truth only inasmuch as we depart from life," said Socrates, when preparing for death. "For what do we, who love truth, strive after in life? To free ourselves from the body, and from all the evil that is caused by the body. If so, then how can we fail to be glad when death comes to us?"

"The wise man seeks death all his life, and therefore does not fear death."

And Schopenhauer also says that life is an evil; and Solomon (or whoever wrote the works attributed to him) says:—

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit hath man of all his labour under the sun? . . . There is no remembrance of former things, neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after. . . .

"Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous to me; for all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

And Sakya Muni, when he learnt what age and sickness and death are, could find no consolation in life, and decided that life is the greatest of evils. And he devoted all the strength of his soul to free

himself from it and to free others, and to do this so that even after death life shall not be renewed any more, but be completely destroyed at its very roots. So speaks all the wisdom of India.

These, then, are the direct replies that human wishes give, when it replies to the question of life:—

“The life of the body is an evil and a lie. Therefore the destruction of the life of the body is a blessing, and we should desire it,” says Socrates.

“Life is that which should not be—an evil; and the passage into nothingness is the only good in life,” says Schopenhauer.

“All that is in the world—folly and wisdom, and riches and poverty, and mirth and grief—are vanity and emptiness. Man dies, and nothing is left of him. And that is stupid,” says Solomon.

“To live in the consciousness of the inevitability of suffering, of becoming enfeebled, of old age, and of death is impossible—we must free ourselves from life, from all possible life,” says Buddha.

And what these strong minds said has been said and thought and felt by millions upon millions of people like them. And I have thought it and felt it.

One cannot deceive oneself. It is all vanity! Happy is he who has not been born. Death is

better than life, and one must free oneself from life.

Then I began to consider the lives of the men of my own kind, and found that they met the problem in one or other of four ways.

The first way was that of ignorance. Some people—mostly women, or very young or very dull people—have not yet understood the question of life; but I, having understood it, could not again shut my eyes.

The second way was that of the epicureans, expressed by Solomon when he said: "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry."

That is the way in which the majority of people of our circle make life possible for themselves. Their circumstances furnish them with more of welfare than of hardship, and their moral dullness makes it possible for them to forget that the advantage of their position is an accidental advantage, and that not every one can have a thousand wives and a thousand palaces like Solomon, and that for every man with a thousand wives there are a thousand without wives, and that for each palace there are a thousand people who have to build it in the sweat of their brows; and that the







accident that has to-day made me a Solomon may to-morrow make me Solomon's slave. The dullness of these people's imaginations enables them to forget what gave no peace to Buddha—the inevitability of sickness, age, and death, which to-day or to-morrow will destroy all these pleasures. I could not imitate these people; I had not their dullness of imagination, and I could not artificially produce it in myself.

The third escape is that of strength and energy. It consists in understanding that life is an evil and an absurdity, and in destroying it. It is a way adopted by a few exceptionally strong and consistent people. I saw that it was the worthiest way of escape, and I wished to adopt it.

The fourth escape is that of weakness. It consists in seeing the truth of the situation, and yet clinging to life as though one still hoped something from it, and I found myself in that category.

To live like Solomon and Schopenhauer, knowing that life is a stupid joke played upon us, and still to go on living, washing oneself, dressing, dining, talking, and even writing books, was to me repulsive and tormenting, but I remained in that position.

It had seemed to me that the narrow circle of rich, learned, and leisured people to whom I belonged formed the whole of humanity, and that the billions of others who have lived and are living were cattle of some sort—not real people. . . . And it was long before it dawned upon me to ask, “But what meaning is, and has been, given to their lives by all the billions of common folk who live and have lived in the world?”

I long lived in this state of lunacy, which in fact if not in words is particularly characteristic of us liberal and learned people. But whether the strange physical affection I have for the real labouring people compelled me to understand them and to see that they are not so stupid as we suppose, or whether it was due to the sincerity of my conviction that I could know nothing beyond the fact that the best I could do was to hang myself, at any rate I instinctively felt that, if I wished to live and understand the meaning of life, I must seek this meaning not among those who have lost it and wish to kill themselves, but among those billions of the past and the present who know it, and who support the burden of their own lives and of ours also.

And on examining the matter I saw that the billions of mankind always have had, and still

have, a knowledge of the meaning of life, but *that* knowledge is their faith, which I could not but reject. "It is God, one and three, the creation in six days, the devil and angels, and all the rest, that I cannot accept as long as I retain my reason," said I to myself.

My position was terrible. I knew I could find nothing along the path of reasonable knowledge, except a denial of life; and in faith I could find nothing but a denial of reason, still more impossible to me than a denial of life.

What am I? A part of the infinite. In those few words lies the whole problem.

I began dimly to understand that in the replies given by faith is stored up the deepest human wisdom.

I understood this; but it made matters no better for me.

I was now ready to accept any faith, if only it did not demand for me a direct denial of reason—which would be a falsehood. And I studied Buddhism and Mohammedanism from books, and most of all, I studied Christianity both from books and from living people.

Naturally I first of all turned to the orthodox of my circle: to people who were learned, to

Church theologians, the monks ; to the theologians of the newest shade ; and even to the Evangelicals who profess salvation by belief in the Redemption. And I seized on these believers and questioned them as to their beliefs, and their understanding of the meaning of life.

But in spite of my readiness to make all possible concessions, I saw that what they gave out as their faith did not explain the meaning of life, but obscured it. . . .

No arguments could convince me of the truth of their faith. Only deeds which showed that they saw a meaning in life, which made what was so dreadful to me—poverty, sickness, and death—not dreadful to them, could convince me. And such deeds I did not see among the various bodies of believers in our circle. On the contrary, I saw such deeds done by people of our circle who were the most unbelieving, but never by so-called believers of our circle.

And I understood that the belief of these people was not the faith I sought, and that their faith is not a real faith, but an epicurean consolation in life.

And I began to draw near to the believers among the poor, simple, unlettered fold : pilgrims, monks, sectarians, and peasants. Among them,

too, I found a great deal of superstition mixed with the Christian truths ; but their superstitions seemed a necessary and natural part of their lives.

. . . And I began to look well into the life and faith of these people ; and the more I considered it, the more I became convinced that they have a real faith, which is a necessity to them, and alone gives their life a meaning and makes it possible for them to live. . . . In contrast with what idleness and amusements and dissatisfaction, I saw that the whole life of these people was passed in heavy labour, and that they were content with life. . . . While we think it terrible that we have to suffer and die, these folk live and suffer, and approach death with tranquillity, and, in most cases, gladly.

And I learnt to love those people. The more I came to know their life the more I loved them, and the easier it became for me to live. So I went on for about two years, and a change took place in me which had long been preparing, and the promise of which had always been in me. The life of our circle, the rich and learned, not merely became distasteful to me, but lost all meaning for me ; while the life of the whole labouring people, the whole of mankind who produce life, appeared to me in its true light. I understood that *that* is

life itself, and that the meaning given to that life is true; and I accepted it.

I then understood that my answer to the question, "What is life?" when I said that life is "evil," was quite correct. The only mistake was, that that answer referred to *my* life, but not to life in general. My life, a life of indulgence and desires, was meaningless and evil. . . . And I understood the truth, which I afterwards found in the Gospels, that men love darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil; and that to see things as they are, one must think and speak of the life of humanity, and not of the life of the minority who are parasites on life. . . .

The conviction that a knowledge of life can only be found by living led me to doubt the goodness of my own life. . . . During that whole year, when I was asking myself almost every moment whether I should not end matters with a noose or a bullet—all that time, alongside the course of thought and observation about which I have spoken, my heart was oppressed with a painful feeling which I can only describe as a search for God.

Not twice or three times, but tens and hundreds of times, I reached those conditions first of joy

and animation, and then of despair and consciousness of the impossibility of living.

I remember that it was in early spring : I was alone in the wood listening to its sounds. I listened and thought ever of the same thing, as I had constantly done during those last three years. I was again seeking God.

"Very well, there is no God," said I to myself ; "there is no one who is not my imagination but a reality like my whole life. He does not exist, and no miracles can prove His existence, because the miracles would be my perceptions, besides being irrational." . . .

But then I turned my gaze upon myself, on what went on within me, and I remembered that I only lived at those times when I believed in God. As it was before, so it was now ; I need only be aware of God to live ; I need only forget Him, or disbelieve in Him, and I die. . . . "What more do you seek ?" exclaimed a voice within me. "This is He. He is that without which one cannot live. To know God and to live is one and the same thing. God is life. Live seeking God, and then you will not live without God." And more than ever before, all within me and around me lit up, and the light did not again abandon me.



And I was saved from suicide. . . . And, strange to say, the strength of life which returned to me was not new, but quite old—the same that had borne me along in my earliest days.

I quite returned to what belonged to my earliest childhood and youth. I returned to the belief in that Will which produced me, and desires something of me. I returned to the belief that the chief and only aim of my life is to be better—that is, to live in accord with that Will. And I returned to the belief that I can find the expression of that Will, in what humanity, in the distant past hidden from me, has produced for its guidance ; that is to say, I returned to a belief in God, in moral perfecting, and in a tradition transmitting the meaning of life. . . .

I turned from the life of our circle : acknowledging that theirs is not life but only a simulacrum of life, and that the conditions of superfluity in which we live deprive us of the possibility of understanding life. . . . The simple labouring people around me were the Russian people, and I turned to them and to the meaning which they give of life. That meaning, if one can put it into words, was the following : Every man has come into this world by the will of God. And God has so made man that every man can destroy his

soul or save it. The aim of man in life is to save his soul; and to save his soul he must live "godly," and to live "godly" he must renounce all the pleasures of life, must labour, humble himself, suffer, and be merciful. . . . The meaning of this was clear and near to my heart. But together with this meaning of the popular faith of our non-sectarian folk among whom I live, much was inseparably bound up that revolted me and seemed to me inexplicable: sacraments, Church services, fasts, and the adoration of relics and icons. The people cannot separate the one from the other, nor could I. And strange as much of it was to me, I accepted everything, and attended the services, knelt morning and evening in prayer, fasted, and prepared to receive the eucharist; and at first my reason did not resist anything. What had formerly seemed to me impossible, did not now evoke in me any resistance. . . .

With all my soul I wished to be in a position to mingle with the people, fulfilling the ritual side of their religion; but I could not do it. I felt that I should lie to myself, and mock at what was sacred to me, were I to do so. At this point, however, our new Russian theological writers came to my rescue.

According to the explanation these theologians

gave, the fundamental dogma of our faith is the infallibility of the Church. From the admission of that dogma follows inevitably the truth of all that is professed by the Church. The Church as an assembly of true-believers united by love, and therefore possessed of true knowledge, became the basis of my belief. I told myself that divine truth cannot be accessible to a separate individual ; it is revealed only to the whole assembly of people united by love. To attain truth one must not separate ; and not to separate, one must love and must endure things one may not agree with.

Truth reveals itself to love, and if you do not submit to the rites of the Church, you transgress against love ; and by transgressing against love you deprive yourself of the possibility of recognizing the truth. I did not then see the sophistry contained in this argument. I did not see that union in love may give the greatest love, but certainly cannot give us divine truth expressed in the definite words of the Nicene Creed. I also did not perceive that love cannot make a certain expression of truth an obligatory condition of union. I did not then see these mistakes in the argument, and thanks to it, was able to accept and perform all the rites of the Orthodox Church without understanding most of them.

When fulfilling the rites of the Church, I humbled my reason, submitted to tradition, united myself with my forefathers—the father, mother, and grandparents I loved—and with all those millions of the common people whom I respected. When rising before dawn for the early Church services, I knew I was doing well, if only because I was sacrificing my bodily ease to humble my mental pride, and for the sake of finding the meaning of life. However insignificant these sacrifices might be, I made them for the sake of something good. I fasted, prepared for communion, observed the fixed hours of prayer at home and in church. During Church service I attended to every word, and gave it a meaning whenever I could.

But this reading of meanings into the rites had its limits. . . .

Never shall I forget the painful feeling I experienced the day I received the eucharist for the first time after many years. The service, confession, and prayers were quite intelligible, and produced in me a glad consciousness that the meaning of life was being revealed to me. The communion itself I explained as an act performed in remembrance of Christ, and indicating a purification from sin and the full acceptance of Christ's

teaching. If that explanation was artificial I did not notice its artificiality, so happy was I at humbling and abasing myself before the priest—a simple, timid country clergyman—turning all the dirt out of my soul and confessing my vices ; so glad was I to merge in thought with the humility of the fathers who wrote the prayers of the office ; so glad was I of union with all who have believed and now believe, that I was not aware of the artificiality of my explanation. But when I approached the altar gates, and the priest made me say that I believed that what I was about to swallow was truly flesh and blood, I felt a pain in my heart : it was not merely a false note ; it was a cruel demand made by some one or other who evidently had never known what faith is. . . .

I continued to fulfil the rites of the Church, and still believed that the doctrine I was following contained the truth, when something happened to me which I now understand, but which then seemed strange.

I was listening to the conversation of an illiterate peasant—a pilgrim—about God, faith, life, and salvation, when a knowledge of faith revealed itself to me. I drew near to the people, listening to their opinions on life and faith, and I understood the truth. So also was it when I read the Lives

of the Saints, which became my favourite books. Excepting the miracles, this reading revealed to me life's meaning. There were the lives of Makarius the Great, of the Tsarevich Joasafa (the story of Buddha), and there were the stories of the traveller in the well, and the monk who found some gold. There were stories of the martyrs, all announcing that death does not exclude life ; and there were the stories of ignorant, stupid men, and such as knew nothing of the teaching of the Church, but who yet were saved.

But as soon as I met learned believers or took up their books, doubt of myself, dissatisfaction, and exasperated disputation was roused within me, and I felt that the more I entered into the meaning of these men's speech the more I went astray from truth and approached an abyss. How often I envied the peasants their illiteracy and lack of learning. Those statements in the creeds, which to me were evident absurdities, for them contained nothing false. Only to me, unhappy man, was it clear that with truth by finest threads was interwoven falsehood, and that I could not accept it in that form.

So I lived for about three years. At first, when I did not understand something, I said, "It is my fault, I am sinful ;" but the more I fathomed the

truth, the clearer I am not able to understand it, and what cannot be understood except by lying to oneself.

In spite of my doubts and sufferings, I still clung to the Orthodox Church. But questions of life arose which had to be decided ; and the decision of these questions by the Church, contrary to the very bases of the belief by which I lived, obliged me at last to own that communion with Orthodoxy is impossible. These questions were: First, the relation of the Orthodox Eastern Church to other Churches—to the Catholics and to the so-called sectarians. At that time, in consequence of my interest in religion, I came into touch with believers of various faiths—Catholics, Protestants, Old-Believers, Molokans, and others. And I met many men of lofty morals who were truly religious. I wished to be a brother to them. And what happened? That teaching which promised to unite all in one faith and love—that very teaching, in the person of its best representatives, told me that these men were all living a lie ; that what gave them their power of life is a temptation of the devil ; and that we alone possess the only possible truth. And I saw that all who do not profess an identical faith with themselves are considered by the Orthodox to be heretics ; just

as the Catholics and others consider the Orthodox to be heretics. And I saw that the Orthodox (though they try to hide this) regard with hostility all who do not express their faith by the same external symbols and words as themselves ; and this is naturally so : first, because the assertion that you are in falsehood and I am in truth is the most cruel thing one man can say to another ; and secondly, because a man loving his children and brothers cannot help being hostile to those who wish to pervert his children and brothers to a false belief. . . . And to me, who considered that truth lay in union by love, it became self-evident that the faith was itself destroying what it ought to produce. . . .

The second relation of the Church to a question of life was with regard to war and executions.

At that time Russia was at war. And Russians, in the name of Christian love, began to kill their fellow-men. It was impossible not to think about this, and not to see that killing is an evil, repugnant to the first principles of any faith. Yet they prayed in the churches for the success of our arms, and the teachers of the faith acknowledged killing to be an act resulting from the faith. And besides the murders during the war, I saw during the disturbances which followed the war Church



dignitaries and teachers and monks of the lesser and stricter orders who approved the killing or helpless erring youths. And I took note of all that is done by men who profess Christianity, and I was horrified.

And I ceased to doubt, and became fully convinced that not all was true in the religion I had joined. Formerly I should have said that it was all false ; but I could not say so now, for I had felt its truth and had lived by it. But I no longer doubted that there is in it much that is false. And though among the peasants there was less admixture of what repelled me, still I saw that in their belief also falsehood was mixed with the truth.

But where did the truth and where did the falsehood come from ? Both the falsehood and the truth were contained in the so-called holy tradition and Scripture. Both the falsehood and the truth had been handed down by what is called the Church.

And whether I liked to or not, I was brought to the study and investigation of these writings and traditions which till now I had been so afraid to investigate.

And I turned to the examination of the same theology which I had rejected with such contempt. . . . On it religious doctrine rests, or at least with it

the only knowledge of the meaning of life that I have found is inseparably connected. . . . I shall not seek the explanation of everything. I know that the explanation of everything, like the commencement of everything, must be concealed in infinity. But I wish to understand in a way which will bring me to what is inevitably inexplicable. I wish to recognize anything that is inexplicable, to be so, not because the demands of my reason are wrong (they are right, and apart from them I can understand nothing), but because I recognize the limits of my reason. I wish to understand in such a way everything that is inexplicable, and not as being something I am under an arbitrary obligation to believe. I must find what is true and what is false, and must disentangle the one from the other. I am setting to work upon this task. What of falsehood I find in the teaching, and what I find of truth, and to what conclusion I come, will form the following parts of this work, which, if it be worth it, and if any one wants it, will probably some day be printed somewhere.

What neither Tolstoy's account of his conversion nor that of the majority of his

biographers sufficiently emphasizes, is that the crisis which appeared to have burst out with such dramatic suddenness had been preparing for many years, and we must have told Tolstoy's life-story to little purpose if the reader has not reached by this time the same conclusion. As we pointed out in a previous passage, from his earliest productions, even in the "Reminiscences of Childhood," written at twenty-three years of age, we can trace in all his works the deep religiousness, the Christian sense of sin, and the striving after moral perfection, the worship of the humble in spirit, the fatalism, the pessimistic mood, the ascetic dread of woman, the obsession of death, the glorification of the simple life, the condemnation of modern culture. He had always been a disciple of Rousseau, he was now to be himself an Oriental Rousseau illumined by Christianity. There may be a contrast between his early life and his later life ; there is no breach of con-

tinuity in his doctrine and message, there is only growth and development.\*

What seemed to justify the theory of "conversion" was that he threw himself into his new life with that whole-heartedness and single-mindedness which has always been one of his chief characteristics. The religious life monopolized for the time being his whole activity. Art was relegated into the background, and in his book, "What is Art?" he came to condemn as immoral his own masterpieces as well as the masterpieces of Beethoven and Wagner. His ideals were indeed the old ideals, but for the first time Tolstoy tried to realize them in his individual life, and in the life of the community. He had always possessed those convictions; henceforth they were to possess him.

The unity and continuity I am emphasizing is only one of certain fundamental convictions

\* I have dwelt specially on this point in an article which I contributed to the Russian Memorial Volume of Tolstoy, and also in my article in the *Contemporary Review*, September 1911.

and traditions, of direction of certain mental tendencies. But we must not seek for any logical consistency, for we shall not find it. I entirely disagree with Mr. Chesterton when he says that it is always possible to foretell *a priori* what will be Tolstoy's opinion on any important problem. As a matter of fact, Tolstoy was never afraid of self-contradiction, neither before nor after his conversion.

It would be a great error to believe that after 1878 Tolstoy did attain to a harmonious synthesis. Indeed, I find greater contradictions after 1878 than before. In the beginning Tolstoy professed an unqualified acceptance of traditional religion. Originally his attitude to Christianity was a catholic and a mystic one. He sought communion with the common people. He sought the companionship of pilgrims and monks. He complied with the directions and services of the Orthodox Church. For a short time he seemed to realize that religion, like politics and like

art, are made not only for the people, but by the people, that they are a collective, not an individual phenomenon. But very soon his strong individualistic-anarchistic tendency, his "pride of intellect," asserted itself. He seemed to have lost the key to the religious history of the West. The wonderful history of the Roman Catholic Church never troubled him for a moment. From being an Orthodox Greek Catholic, he became an ultra-Protestant. From being a mystic surrendering his reason to simple unquestioning faith, he became a rationalist of the extreme type. As was pointed out in another chapter, he came to carry out in every detail the religious programme which he had set himself thirty years before: *to establish the Christian religion, but purged of dogmas and mysticism, a practical religion, not promising future bliss, but giving bliss on earth.*

Consistently with that programme, he went the length of denying not only the

dogmas of the Church, but the immortality of the soul. He very soon travelled beyond Christianity, or at least he asserted that there was nothing in Christianity which could not be found in the great religions of the past, in Buddhism or Confucianism. *To all intents and purposes he became a positivist*, although he was never prepared to admit it, and though even his most penetrating critics seem to have failed to see it.

“For me the doctrine of Jesus is simply one of those beautiful doctrines which we have received from Egyptian, Jewish, Hindoo, Chinese, and Greek antiquity. The two great principles of Jesus : love of God (in a word, absolute perfection) and love of one’s neighbour (that is to say, love of all men without distinction) have been preached by all the sages of the world—Krishna, Buddha, Lao-tse, Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and among the moderns,

Rousseau, Pascal, Kant, Emerson, Channing, and many others. Religion and moral truth is everywhere and always the same. *I have, no predilection whatever for Christianity.* If I have been particularly interested in the doctrine of Jesus, it is: Firstly, because I was born in that religion, and have lived amongst Christians; secondly, because I have found a great spiritual joy in freeing the doctrine in its purity from the astounding falsifications wrought by the Churches.”—  
(From a letter to a friend, 1909.)

For several years Tolstoy devoted himself to exegetic labours. Even as he had undertaken the study of Greek for the sake of his folklore studies, he now undertook the study of Hebrew. It need hardly be pointed out that Tolstoy's studies could have little scientific value. Even a giant like him could not create science anew, and could not master or sift in two or three years the results of several



generations of scholarship. And here again, let us repeat, that in the science of biblical criticism as in politics his individualism and his defiant originality stood in his way. He was essentially a heretic—that is, he was the man who takes and chooses only what agrees with his foregone conclusions.

It might be argued, indeed, that Tolstoy's selection of the fundamental Gospel doctrines was not an arbitrary one, and that he searched for the criterion of Christianity where alone it can be found, namely, in the lives of Christian people, and that the lives of Christians are all based on a very few simple principles. They all proclaim the necessity of poverty and the surrender of worldly goods. They all proclaim the necessity of chastity and purity, and they all proclaim the necessity of charity and of non-resistance to evil.

But the answer to the objection is an obvious one. Tolstoy is only begging the

question, and none of these principles have found or are finding universal acceptance in the sense in which he understood them. The principle of poverty has only been systematically carried out in exceptional circumstances and in brief moments of enthusiasm. The doctrine of chastity is only accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, and in the name of that very mysticism which Tolstoy rejects. That doctrine of chastity is denied by the Protestant Churches, in the name of that very rationalism which Tolstoy extols. As for the principles of charity, of toleration and non-resistance to evil, historical Christianity does not seem to have insisted on the exercise of these virtues. Indeed the Western Churches have wielded the sword and preached intolerance and fought heresy as an essential part of a Christian's duty. Why, then, should Tolstoy have singled out the doctrine of non-resistance as vitally important? Why, indeed,

except that he was following the logic of his own temperament.\*

In a famous passage of the "Apologia" Cardinal Newman describes the ineffable repose and serenity which his "conversion" brought to his weary soul. It cannot be said that Tolstoy's conversion brought him either peace or rest. This was out of the question—for his anxious mind, after 1878, even more than before, was in quest of new spiritual worlds to conquer. But his conversion certainly did bring him inward joy and happiness. It put an end to the acute mental distress, to the constantly recurring fits of depression, to the suicidal tendencies which used to distract him. It is often assumed, and gratuitously assumed, that his Christianity cast a gloom over his declining years. He is too often represented as a prophet of despair denouncing his age and speaking in the

\* I have dwelt at considerable length on the psychological aspect of religion in my book on Newman.

wilderness. Tolstoy became a Puritan, but he did not resemble the Puritans of England or Scotland. No man ever enjoyed life more keenly than Tolstoy did after 1878.

In May 1879 he writes to his friend Fet :—

“It is long since I so enjoyed God’s world as I have done this year. One stands open mouthed, delighting in it, and fearing to move lest one should miss anything. . . . My wife has gone to Toula with the children, and I am reading good books and shall presently go for a three or four hours’ walk.”

Again he writes on the 8th July :—

“It is now summer, and a charming summer, and as usual I go crazy with life and forget my work. This year I struggled long, but the beauty of the world conquered me, I enjoy life and do hardly anything

else. Our house is full of visitors. The children have got up theatricals, and it is noisy and merry. I have with difficulty found a corner, and snatched a moment, to write you a word. . . .”

In April 1882 he describes in a letter to his wife the kind of life he was leading at Yasnaya Polyana :—

“I went out to-day at eleven, and was intoxicated by the beauty of the morning. It was warm and dry. Here and there in the frost-glaze of the footpaths little spikes and tufts of grass show up from under the dead leaves and straw ; the buds are swelling on the lilacs ; the birds no longer sing at random, but have already begun to converse about something ; and round the sheltered corners of the house and by the manure heaps bees are humming. I saddled my horse and rode out.

“ In the afternoon I read, and then went to the apiary and the bathing-house. Everywhere grass, birds, honey-bees ; no policemen, no pavement, no cabmen, no stinks, and it is very pleasant—so pleasant that I grow sorry for you, and think that you and the children must certainly come here earlier, and I will remain in Moscow with the boys. For me, with my thoughts, it is equally good or bad everywhere ; and as for my health, town can have no effect on it, but it has a great effect on yours and the children.”

At the same time Tolstoy's conversion brought him into new conflicts with his surroundings, and especially with his family.

He condemned the Turkish War of 1877, although this war was undertaken in favour of and resulted in the liberation of the Slav nationalities in the Balkans. He condemned equally the reactionary policy of

the Government and the violence of the revolutionists. From this time onwards Tolstoy constantly found himself between two fires. He denounced the assassination of Alexander II., yet he sent to Alexander III. a pathetic appeal in favour of the assassins.

Persistent as was Tolstoy's opposition of his political and social surroundings, his opposition to those nearest and dearest to him was even more painful. In the conflict with his wife and children lies, in our opinion, the real tragedy of Tolstoy's latter years, and if the veil were lifted, and we could follow day by day Tolstoy's relations to his family, that tragedy would prove to be even more pathetic than has hitherto been suspected. What we know suffices to make us realize how much Tolstoy suffered from this cause.\*

\* The posthumous drama, "The Light that Shines in Darkness," which has just been published by Messrs. Nelson, throws a vivid light on the tragic conflicts which went on for a quarter of a century in the Tolstoy family. It is in a literal sense an autobiography cast in dramatic form, and as such it is probably unique.

The correspondence between husband and wife during those critical years is one of the most fascinating and most pathetic human documents in the whole range of literature. A Roman Catholic might argue that it goes a long way to showing the wisdom of the Catholic doctrine on celibacy. It explains Tolstoy's own opinions on the single state as a higher state of perfection. But how much less complete, if less complex, a personality Tolstoy would have been without his conflicts and contradictions ! He might have been a great prophet, but how much less human and how much less interesting !

Countess Tolstoy fully realizes her position with regard to her husband. She wrote to her sister in January 1885 :—

“Lyovotchka is very tranquil, and at work writing some article or other [it was “What do I Believe”]. Remarks against



town life and the life of the well-to-do in general burst from him occasionally. That pains me ; but I know he cannot help it. He is a leader : one who goes ahead of the crowd, pointing the way men should go. But I am the crowd ; I live in its current. Together with the crowd I see the light of the lamp which every leader (and Lyovotchka, of course, also) carries, and I acknowledge it to be the light. But I cannot go faster, I am held by the crowd, and by my surroundings and habits."

Like Desdemona, she perceives a divided duty, she feels distracted between what she owes to her husband and what she owes to her children. She sees the family property going to wreck and ruin, and when she is threatened with bankruptcy she decides to call a halt and to interfere with vigour, and she establishes a publishing firm to sell the works of her husband. In the

very first year the sales amount to six thousand pounds.

She anxiously notes the change going on in her husband :—

“Lyovotchka has now quite settled down to his writing. His eyes are fixed and strange, he hardly talks at all, has quite ceased to belong to this world, and is positively incapable of thinking about everyday matters.

“Lyovotchka has quite overworked himself. His head is always aching, but he cannot tear himself away. Dostoievsky's death produced a great impression on him and on us all ; to have just become so celebrated and so generally beloved, and then to die. It has set Lyovotchka thinking about his own death, and he has become more absorbed and more silent.

“If you only knew and heard Lyovotchka now. He has altered very much. He has

become a most sincere and firm Christian. But he has gone grey, his health is worse, and he has become quieter and more depressed."

" . . . The first, most dismal, and saddest thing when I awoke was your letter. It gets worse and worse. I begin to think that if a happy man suddenly sees only what is terrible in life, and shuts his eyes to what is good, it must be the result of illness. You ought to undergo a cure ; I say it without any *arrière pensée*. This seems clear to me. I am terribly sorry for you, and if you would consider my words and your own position without irritation, you would perhaps find a way out.

"That state of melancholy used to befall you long ago ; you say 'From lack of faith I wished to hang myself.' And now ? Did you not know before that hungry, sick, unhappy, and bad people exist ? Look more

carefully, and you will find merry, healthy, and good people also. May God help you—but what can I do in the matter ? ”

She chafes him for what she considers his eccentricities :—

“ Yesterday I received your letter, and it made me sad. I see that you have remained at Yasnaya not to do the mental work I regard as higher than anything in life, but to play at being Robinson Crusoe. You have sent away Andrian [a man-servant], who was desperately anxious to stay out the month, and have let the man-cook go, to whom it would also have been a pleasure to do something for his pension ; and from morning to evening you will be doing unprofitable physical work, which even among the peasants is done by the young men and the women. So it would have been better and more useful had you remained with the children. Of course you will say

that to live so accords with your convictions, and that you enjoy it. That is another matter, and I can only say, 'Enjoy yourself;' but all the same I am annoyed that such mental strength should be lost at log-splitting, lighting *samovars*, and making boots—which are all excellent as a rest or a change of occupation, but not as a special employment. Well, enough of that. Had I not written it, I should have remained vexed; but now it is past, and the thing amuses me, and I have quieted down, saying, 'Let the child amuse itself as it likes, so long as it doesn't cry'" (a Russian proverb).

But she has no sooner expressed her disapproval than she feels regret, and on the same day she writes another letter.

"All at once I pictured you vividly to myself, and a sudden flood of tenderness rose in me. There is something in you so wise,

kind, naïve, and obstinate, and it is all lit up by that tender interest for every one, natural to you alone, and by your look that reaches straight to people's souls."

Tolstoy feels the situation even more acutely than his wife—because to him it is a matter of conscience, and his whole moral influence is at stake.

"I know very well that my arguments were not very convincing. But, rightly or wrongly, I believe that I can make them irrefutable to any logical and reasonable man. But I have become convinced that to convince by logic is not necessary. I have passed through that stage. What I have written and said is sufficient to indicate the path ; every seeker will find it for himself, and will find better and fuller arguments, more suitable to himself; but the thing is to indicate the path. Now I have become

convinced that only one's life can show the path; only the example of one's life. The effect of that example is very slow, very indefinite (in the sense that, I think, one cannot possibly know whom it will influence), and very difficult. But it alone gives a real impulse. Example is the proof of the possibility of Christian—that is, of reasonable and happy—life under all possible conditions. That alone moves people; and that alone is necessary both to me and to you—so let us help one another to give it. Write to me, and let us be as truthful as possible with one another.

“One's family is one's flesh. To abandon one's family is the second temptation: to kill oneself. But do not yield to the third temptation. Serve not the family, but the one God. One's family is the indicator of the place one must occupy on the economic ladder. It is one's flesh: as a weak stomach needs light food, so a pampered family

needs more than a family accustomed to privations."

It is especially when he lives amidst the artificial surroundings of the town that he suffers from the contradiction between his way of living and his convictions. On his removal to Moscow he writes in his diary on 5th October:—

"A month has passed. The most tormenting in my life. The move to Moscow. All are busy arranging. When will they begin to live? All of it, not for the sake of living, but to be like other people. Unfortunates. Life is lacking.

"Smells, stones, luxury, destitution, and vice. Malefactors have come together, robbed the people, collected soldiers, and set up law courts to protect their orgies, and they feast. The people can do nothing, but, taking advantage of the passions of these others, lure back from them what has been



stolen. The men peasants are cleverest at that. Their wives remain in the villages while they wax our parquet floors and rub our bodies in the baths, and ply as cabmen."

A few days later the Countess writes to her sister :—

"To-morrow we shall have been here a month, and I have not written a word to any one. For the first fortnight I cried every day, because Lyovotchka not only became depressed, but even fell into a kind of desperate apathy. He did not sleep and did not eat, and sometimes literally wept; and I really thought I should go mad. You would be surprised to see how I have altered and how thin I have grown. Afterwards he went to the Province of Tver and visited his old acquaintances the Bakounines (a Liberal-artistic Zemstvo literary house), and then went to a village to see some sectarian Christian, and when he returned he was less in the

dumps. Now he has arranged to work in the wing, where he has hired himself two small, quiet rooms for six roubles a month. Then he goes across the Maidens' Field and over the river to the Sparrow Hills, and there he saws and splits wood with some peasants. It is good for his health and cheers him up."

The scenes between Tolstoy and his wife generally end by his rushing off to Yasnaya Polyana. In the country he recovers his equanimity, and he usually gives way and apologizes to his wife.

"You will be going to Moscow to-day. You would not believe how troubled I am at the thought that you may be overtaxing your strength, and how I repent of having given you little or no help.

"In this respect the koumyss has done good: it has brought me down from the point of view from which, carried away by my word, I involuntarily regarded every-

thing. I now see things differently. I still have the same thoughts and feelings, but am cured of the delusion that others can and should see everything as I do. I am much to blame towards you, darling, unconsciously, involuntarily, as you know; but still none the less to blame.

“My excuse is that in order to work with the intensity with which I worked, and to get something done, one has to forget all else. And I forgot you too much, and now repent. For Heaven’s sake, and our love’s sake, take care of yourself. Put off as much as you can till my return; I will gladly do everything, and will not do it amiss, for I will take pains.”

But the cause of friction is always there, and not always does the permanent disagreement between husband and wife end so peacefully. Sometimes the spirit of Tolstoy is roused and his conscience carries him, to use

Mr. Bernard Shaw's phrase, "into inhuman callousness." \* The following incident, described by Mr. Maude and so severely commented on by Mr. Shaw, strangely reminds one of the famous scene in Ibsen's poetical masterpiece between Brand and his wife, where the cruel idealism of the hero reaches its climax :—†

"His youngest daughter, Alexandra, was born on 18th June 1884 under very painful circumstances. Tolstoy was just passing through one of his periods of acute distress on account of what he deemed the wrongfulness of the external conditions of his life.

"The evening before her birth he left home saying that he could not endure to live in such luxury, and the Countess remained

\* See Mr. Bernard Shaw's paper in *The Fabian*. Those two brief columns contain more illuminating criticism than many a volume that has been written on Tolstoy.

† I am informed that Tolstoy's own version of this incident contained in his diaries, and written immediately after the event, entirely conflicts with the version of Countess Tolstoy, which was recorded at a much later date, and which has been accepted by Mr. Aylmer Maude.

in uncertainty as to whether he would ever return.

“Soon the birth-pangs began, and they were long continued. The Countess sat or lay weeping in the garden, refusing to go to her room; and at five o'clock in the morning, when she heard that her husband had returned, she went to him in his study, and asked what she had done to be so punished. ‘My fault is only that I have not changed, while you have.’

“Tolstoy sat gloomy and morose, and did not console her. The struggle in his own soul was more important to him than life or death.

“The Countess at last retired to her room, and the child was born almost immediately; but the mother's milk was quite spoilt by the anguish she had endured, and to this fact she attributes that her youngest daughter seems less hers than any of her other children.”

## Chapter VIII

### THE AFTERMATH

**I**T is generally assumed that Tolstoy's conversion proved fatal to his creative activity, and that he was paralyzed by his absorption in religious and social reform, as Goethe was paralyzed in his latter years by his absorption in science and philosophy. Tolstoy's contemporaries are almost unanimous in their regrets that he should waste his genius ploughing the fields, mending old boots, or dabbling in higher criticism and theological controversy.

From his deathbed, Turgenief sent a pressing appeal to his lifelong friend and rival, urging him to return to literature :—

“BOUGIVAL, *June 27 or 28, 1883.*

“KIND AND DEAR LEO NIKOLAIEVICH,—  
I have long not written to you because, to tell the truth, I have been, and am, on my deathbed. I cannot recover : that is out of the question. I am writing to you specially to say how glad I have been to be your contemporary, and to express my last and sincere request. My friend, return to literary activity. That gift came to you from whence comes all the rest. Ah ! how happy I should be if I could think my request would have an effect on you. I am played out ; the doctors do not even know what to call my malady—*névralgie, stomacale, goutteuse*. I can neither walk, nor eat, nor sleep. It is wearisome even to repeat it all. My friend—great writer of our Russian land—listen to my request. Let me know you have received this scrap of paper, and allow me yet once more cordially to embrace you,

your wife, and yours. . . . I can write no more. . . . I am tired."

We have seen in the foregoing chapter that this feeling, to which Turgenieff gives such eloquent expression, was shared by his own family.\*

Countess Tolstoy deplotes whatever takes him away from his creative work. In 1882 she disapproves of his studying Hebrew, as the year before she had disapproved of his studying Greek and of his educational experiments.

"Lyovotchka is learning to read Hebrew, and I am grieved about it : he is spending his strength on trifles. From this work both his health and spirits have deteriorated, and this torments me still more, and I cannot hide my dissatisfaction. . . .

"Lyovotchka, alas ! has bent all his

\* Tolstoy never answered this pathetic appeal from his life-long rival and friend : another argument in favour of those who admit a certain hardness and inhumanity in the religious teacher.



strength to learning Hebrew, and nothing else occupies or interests him. No; evidently his literary activity is at an end, and it is a great, great pity."

On the contrary, his wife is in raptures whenever the poetic fit seizes him and whenever he is compelled to drop his didactic studies :—

"What a joyful feeling seized me when I read that you again wished to write something poetic.

"You have felt what I have long waited and longed for. In that lies salvation and joy—that will again unite us, and will console you, and will light up your life. That is real work, for which you were created, and outside that sphere you cannot force yourself. But God grant you may cherish that gleam, and that that divine spark in you may again kindle and spread. The thought enchants me."

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A closer examination of the facts of Tolstoy's later life does not bear out the assumption of his friends and relatives. It is true that for several years after 1878 Tolstoy was immersed in his theological labours. But the interruption, as was stated before, was natural and inevitable after the titanic effort of "Anna Karenina;" and after the interruption there was a renewed outburst of the poetic faculty, which gave the lie to the pessimistic prophecies of his admirers. One masterpiece followed another in rapid succession: "The Death of Ivan Ilyitch,"

What shall we do then?" "The Powers of Darkness," "The Kreutzer Sonata," and most of the "Folk-Stories."

There is probably no example in literary history of such stupendous productivity at so advanced a period of life. Both Goethe and Victor Hugo wrote a very great deal between seventy and eighty years of age, but there is a lamentable falling off in the

quality of their work. In the case of Tolstoy, so far was the gold mine from being exhausted, that he was ever discovering new veins yielding richer ore. He was ever trying new experiments, inventing new themes and new forms of expression. Nor is there any deterioration in the artistic temperament. There is the same truthfulness and sincerity, the same imagination and spiritual insight, the same cumulative effect produced by the mere repetition of little magic touches.\*

The "Death of Ivan Ilyitch" is one of the most original and one of the most powerful of Tolstoy's stories. The subject—the slow, insidious advance of disease, and its disintegrating effect on the character of the sufferer—is a comparatively novel one in literature. So far as I am aware, it has only been attempted with something of the same

\* All these remarks receive a striking confirmation from the publication of the posthumous works.

power by Maupassant, to whom Tolstoy has repeatedly paid eloquent tribute. The ideas underlying "Ivan Ilyitch," and its atmosphere, are familiar to the student of previous works: the haunting vision of death, the satire of medical quackery, the attacks on the bureaucracy, the exposure of the bourgeois conception of marriage and of home life.

Mr. Aylmer Maude contends with other critics that it is the predominance of the didactic element in Tolstoy's later works which distinguishes them from his earlier masterpieces. If this contention were true, one might draw an interesting parallel between Tolstoy and George Eliot, in whose later work the philosopher nearly killed the artist. But I do not think that the contention is justified. It is true, no doubt, that a story like "Ivan Ilyitch" has been written with a purpose, but the purpose never obtrudes itself. The didacticism shows itself in the general impression produced rather

than in the treatment of the subject. *One might even argue that "Ivan Ilyitch" is less didactic than previous works, as if Tolstoy had been aware of the danger and was guarding against it.* Even in "War and Peace" the commentary sometimes interrupts the narrative; in "Ivan Ilyitch" the tragedy of life is brought so vividly before us that we need no commentary nor conclusion.

"The Powers of Darkness" is the first attempt of Tolstoy in dramatic literature. That any writer should have been able to produce such a masterpiece as his first trial in one of the most difficult forms of literary art, and one in which training and technique are most indispensable, would have been sufficiently wonderful! But that such a trial should have succeeded when the writer had reached the age of fifty-eight, and when he was just recovering from a painful illness which had brought him to death's door, makes the achievement all the more marvellous.

Tolstoy has often been accused of idealizing and idolizing the peasant, like George Sand in her rustic novels. The accusation is groundless, and he has met it himself in a well-known passage of "Anna Karenina." He knew the virtues of the peasantry, but he also knew their vices; and no writer—not even Zola in the "Soil"—has depicted with more inexorable realism the darker side of peasant life. There is, however, this difference between Zola's realism and Tolstoy's—that from the circles of Zola's "inferno" there is no exit, whilst in Tolstoy's drama the light of Christianity and Humanity triumphs over the "powers of darkness."

Tolstoy's last son, Ivan, was born on the 31st March 1888. The writer was just sixty years of age. He had had thirteen children. In the following year the father of this patriarchal family wrote the "Kreutzer Sonata," a most formidable indictment against the institution of marriage and of the family.

Under the thin disguise of a narrative and a confession—the confession of a man who has killed his wife in a fit of jealousy—the “Kreutzer Sonata” is, in fact, a homily on sexual morality. Tolstoy does not examine the problem of sex, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, from the hygienic or economic or social side. No consideration of eugenics or poverty does in the least affect his point of view. His doctrine is a strange mixture of Schopenhauer and the Gospel. His principle is that of strict continence in wedlock, and out of wedlock his ideal is absolute chastity. *Virginity is a higher ideal than marriage, and the old maid is a nobler character than the married woman.* Marriage has been sanctified by the Church and made into a sacrament, but marriage is in fact a deflection from the highest Christian ideal.

“The Christian ideal is not marriage : there is no such thing as Christian marriage. *Marriage from the point of view of a Christian*

*is not an element of progress, but is a fall. Love, and whatever precedes it and follows it, is an obstacle to the true human ideal.*

“We should understand that no aim which we count worthy of a man—whether it be the service of humanity, fatherland, science, or art (not to speak of God)—can be attained by means of connection with the object of one’s love (either with or without marriage rite). On the contrary, falling in love and marriage (however one may seek to prove the contrary in prose and verse) never facilitate, but always impede, the attainment of any worthy aim. . . .

“The Christian ideal is that of love of God and one’s fellow-man. . . . Whereas sexual love, marriage, in the service of self, is in any case an obstacle to the service of God and man, and therefore, from a Christian point of view, a fall, a sin.

“To get married would not help the service of God and man, though it were



done to perpetuate the human race. For that purpose, instead of getting married and producing fresh children, it would be much simpler to save and rear those millions of children who are now perishing around us for lack of food for their bodies, not to mention food for their souls. . . .

“Only if he were sure that all existing children were provided for, could a Christian enter upon marriage without being conscious of moral fall.

“In the Gospels it is said clearly, and so that there is no possibility of misinterpretation : First, that a married man should not divorce his wife to take another, but should live with her whom he has once taken. Secondly, that it is wrong (and it is said of men generally, married or unmarried) to look on a woman as an object of desire. And, thirdly, that for the unmarried it is better not to marry—that is to say, it is better to be quite chaste. . . .”

Whilst discussing the problems of woman and love and marriage Tolstoy incidently exposes in scathing denunciations the universally prevalent sexual immorality, the world-wide worship of the Goddess Lubricity, the artificial social conditions conducive to morbid sexual sensitiveness, the fashions in dress, the insensate luxury, art and literature, music and the stage, all pandering to sensuality. Above all, he denounces the complicity of medical men, who in the name of science incite women to the most criminal practices and poison the wells of public opinion. Like Montaigne and Molière, like Rousseau and Bernard Shaw, like most great writers in modern literature, Tolstoy is an irreconcilable enemy to the unfortunate medical practitioner.

It was to be expected that, keenly as Tolstoy was interested in every moral aspect of the woman problem, he did not take the slightest interest in its political

aspect. He thought that woman is incapable of political rights and of taking a disinterested view on any great public question, *and he held generally that woman is morally inferior to man.* His opinions on the suffrage question are one more instance of his general opposition to "progressive" politics. That he should have held such views in an age of "feminism" and suffragism, and in a country where woman has often played an important part in revolutionary movements, was indeed an anachronism, and sufficiently illustrates Tolstoy's supreme contempt for popularity, as well as his contempt for the facts whenever those facts do not agree with his theories.

The "Kreutzer Sonata" has been more keenly discussed and more bitterly attacked than any other of the author's works. The sex relation had always played an important part in his life. If his early years had been dissolute, he had become a most uxorious

husband ; and the first ten years of his married life had been amongst the most happy and the most creative of his life. But in later years the family relationship had proved the most formidable obstacle in the carrying out of his ideal. It is therefore not to be wondered at that when the ideal completely took possession of him Tolstoy, generalizing, as he always did, from his own individual experience, should have reached on the subject of marriage those views which he ultimately did reach. Nor ought we to forget that here again his later views are already implicitly contained in his earlier works. Even in the great novels marriage is generally a failure : illusion and disappointment are the rule rather than the exception. The advice of Prince André to his friend Peter Bezoukhof, "Do not marry," seems to express Tolstoy's earliest attitude to marriage. And finally, the glorification of virginity, the depreciation of

marriage, was a tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church in which Tolstoy had been brought up, as it still is the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. What did shock and stagger the world were the reasons advocated in support of his thesis, and the almost brutal realism of the views therein expressed. What did astonish the world was that this glorification of the single life was emanating from a writer who had made his wife sixteen times a mother !

The title of the "Kreutzer Sonata" was misleading. Tolstoy has mixed up two questions : the depraving influence of music and of love. Tolstoy, like his master Schopenhauer, was profoundly sensitive to the most universal of all the arts, and it moved him as no other art did. It occupies a large place in his life and in his works. He was at one time on intimate terms with the great composer Tchaikovsky, who professed to be his disciple, and he was himself

an excellent accompanist. He would sit down to the piano before his morning's work, and he found inspiration in playing. But precisely because he experienced in himself the magic spell of music, he realized and dreaded its dangers. The demonic element in music found a response in and called out the demonic element in himself. The simple, restrained, classical music of Mozart and Haydn, which he loved so well, might, if directed into the proper channels, have exercised a beneficial influence, but even the best music had a tendency to weaken the will power. As for the later developments of the art—the "artificial and complicated" masterpieces of Beethoven and Wagner—he asserted that they always had a relaxing and dissolving influence, and that they stimulated our sensitiveness, which was already morbidly excited.

With advancing years Tolstoy's dread of music increased parallelly with his dread of

woman, and he, the uncompromising anarchist, even went the length of advocating Government interference.

“Music ought to be under the control of the State, as in China. One ought not to allow that the first-comer should wield such an awful power of hypnotizing people. Compositions like the first presto of the ‘Kreutzer Sonata’ one ought only to have the permission to play in certain important circumstances.”

The writer who thus exposed the dangers of music never ceased to love it. One of the friends of his last days was a musician, Goldenweiser, who spent the summer of 1910 in the neighbourhood of Yasnaya Polyana. He came nearly every day to play to the Master during his last illness. It was one of the many inconsistencies of the Grand Old Man.

## Chapter IX

### TOLSTOY AS A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL REFORMER

WE have now reached the most extraordinary stage of a most extraordinary life. Having finished the "Kreutzer Sonata," Tolstoy could look back on a literary career of thirty-five years of almost uninterrupted activity. He had now attained an age when most writers are content to consider their life-work as accomplished, and when even the most strenuous begin to show signs of fatigue. But so far was Tolstoy from showing any trace of mental exhaustion, that his vitality was never more superabundant, nor his temper more aggressive, nor his enthusiasm more ardent, nor his productivity



more versatile. He combined the parts of a novelist, dramatist, educationalist, and theologian with the parts of a ploughman, a cobbler, and a pilgrim.

Disappointment and failure did not damp his ardour. Even disease did not seem to affect him. Again and again he was at death's door, and the world's press contained obituary notices. Erysipelas, pleurisy, angina pectoris in turn laid him prostrate. But his recuperative powers were miraculous: his constitution gave the lie to all medical prognostications. The indomitable will triumphed over the disorder, and each time he seemed to emerge from his illness rejuvenated, and ready to try fresh experiments and to fight new battles. We need only to remember that it was whilst recovering from a deadly attack of erysipelas that he made his first and most successful attempt in drama : " The Powers of Darkness."

Although the artist continued to produce





masterpieces almost to the end—although “Resurrection” was only finished when the author was in his seventy-second year—it was mainly as a teacher and preacher that Tolstoy stood before the world for the last twenty years of his life. Europe and America gradually got accustomed to looking to Yasnaya Polyana for guidance in the crises of their history. Visitors from all parts of the world flocked to the dilapidated dwelling of the prophet. No important event occurred without Tolstoy issuing a letter or tract, or without launching an appeal or a protest. In 1895 he writes an appeal on behalf of the persecuted Doukhobors. In 1899 he writes a letter on peace to the Hague Conference. In 1902 he sends a letter to the Tsar, and a message to the working people. In 1905 he protests against the massacres of Kishinef and against the Jew-baiting then prevalent in Russia. In 1904 he utters a protest against the Japanese War, and at the same

time he condemns the revolutionary movement in Russia. In 1908 he protests against the courts-martial, and continues his campaign in favour of Henry George and land nationalization.

As far back as 1854 Tolstoy had said of himself, "I am no politician." It might have been better if he had always remained conscious of his limitations, for he never succeeded in understanding the very elements of political science. To him, social and political reform was only a corollary of religion and ethics. To him the duties of the statesman were not different from those of a private individual, and collective action was only different in degree and in scope but not in kind from individual action. If hatred and covetousness and untruth were bad in private individuals, they were far worse in nations.

In so far as Tolstoy had any politics they were purely negative. He separated himself from his master Rousseau in not recog-

nizing any social compact and in ignoring the very existence of the State. Tolstoy's political philosophy was undiluted and unmitigated anarchism; and as his anarchism claimed to be based on Christianity, it may be called a Christian anarchism. And just as Tolstoy refuses to accept the State, he refuses to recognize laws and law courts, property and money. All those things are essentially evil: it is our duty not to recognize them, not to assist in them, not to connive at them. We must refuse to serve on the jury; we must refuse to pay taxes and give military service. On the other hand, as Christians, we must not oppose violence to violence. Our only weapon against political evil is the example of our suffering and long-suffering: the practice of the law of love and brotherhood.\*

That so gigantic a mind, with so lucid a

\* The most striking presentation of Tolstoy's political theories is contained in the posthumous drama "The Light that Shines in Darkness," just published by Messrs. Nelson.

vision of life and so firm a grasp of concrete reality, should have countenanced theories so manifestly absurd and so impracticable has remained until this day an insoluble paradox. As a matter of fact, a Western intellect cannot solve it. It is almost necessary to be a Russian to understand it. And here we must again remind the reader that the politics of Tolstoy in every minute particular are the outcome of his Russian surroundings, and that, considered from that point of view, there is little originality in them.

As we pointed out in the introduction to this book, his Christian anarchism is a typical Russian malady. It is not a mere accident that the leading anarchists of modern times should have been Russians: Bakounine, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy. It is only on the surface that Russia is an autocracy and a bureaucracy. In reality, the Russian empire is a huge aggregate of one hundred thousand independent communities and republics. The Russian

people do not only suffer from an excess of government, they suffer even more from an absence of government. The village elder in the Mir, or the country squire on his estate, may be equally tyrannical and irresponsible. The power of the State may either not be felt at all, or it is felt as an evil. Little wonder, therefore, that there should be so little sense of citizenship and so little public spirit in the Russian people ; that the most perfect gentleman in private life should not hesitate to take bribes in public life ; that the average Russian should have remained State-blind ; and that writers like Tolstoy should have raised this State-blindness to the dignity of a principle.

As anarchism is essentially a Russian disease, so is fatalism and non-resistance to evil. No race has suffered more from the tyranny of man and the cruelty of Nature.\*

\* I take the liberty to refer to my paper on the geographical foundations of Russian politics in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 1905.



Fire devastates every year one-fifth of the wooden dwellings of the Russian people. The climate freezes to death thousands of victims, and the tragedy narrated in "Master and Servant" is an everyday occurrence. Famine always stares the Russian peasant in the face, and devastates enormous tracts of the empire.\* Famine relief has again and again engaged the activity of Tolstoy. Life in Russia is a perpetual struggle against hostile forces, and in that struggle Nature prevails. And even where man does obtain the mastery, it is only by dint of long suffering and resignation that he wins the battle. It is this fatalism which is both the strength and the weakness of the race. It is this passive yet heroic resistance which Tolstoy has so often and so admirably depicted, and which he has finally glorified into a religious precept and made into a supreme evangelical virtue.

\* Russia is just now (1912) in the throes of an appalling famine.

No other part of Tolstoy's many-sided activity has been subjected to so much criticism as his social and political propaganda, and it must be confessed that much of the criticism is amply justified. People might have put up with his scathing denunciations, if he himself had made his practice to agree with his convictions. He wanted society to carry out his Utopia, and he reviled it for not doing so. If, like St. Francis of Assisi, he had made "holy poverty his spouse" in practice as well as in theory, the world would not have imitated him, but it would have listened to him and would have canonized him. But Tolstoy was not a Francis of Assisi; he was not a Roman Catholic or a Byzantine saint, and he was not a martyr. He lacked the divine gift of cheerful humility and the courage of absolute self-renunciation, and the world therefore legitimately resented being reviled for not accomplishing what the prophet himself failed to accomplish.

It would be a thankless task to show how Tolstoy's feeble and erratic attempts to carry out his convictions led him to an endless succession of tortuous evasions and semi-comic, semi-pathetic self-contradictions. But he did not only himself land in failure—he sent out others to assume tasks which were doomed to end in disaster. Of the many Tolstoy colonies started in Russia, England, and America, not one succeeded. Mr. Aylmer Maude, whose testimony will not be suspected, has told us the lamentable tale of these failures.

Even more lamentable was the story of the Doukhobors. Tolstoy assumed that in this persecuted sect he at last had found Christian disciples after his own heart—an ideal combination of the Quaker and the Communist ; and when the Russian Government systematically set itself to persecute them he initiated their wholesale migration to Canada. It was discovered too late that Tolstoy had entirely

misread the character of the sect, and that this religious democracy was in fact a fanatic and excessive autocracy; that the Doukhobors believed their leader Veragine to be the incarnation of the Almighty, and that all his utterances were verbally inspired and infallible. They refused to pay taxes. They were equally extreme in their advocacy of the simple life. They rejected clothes and decided to return to the simplicity of the naked savage, until the Canadian Government put an end to their unseemly practical demonstration of Christian anarchism.

But no biographer of Tolstoy will be inclined to judge harshly of his ill-starred crusade in favour of the Doukhobors, for to this crusade we indirectly owe the last but not the least of his masterpieces. A considerable sum of money was needed to assist the Doukhobors' migration to Canada. To raise the money Tolstoy wrote "Resurrection." The work, therefore, may be called

a novel with a purpose in more senses than one. It was written with the purpose of rescuing from persecution a heroic sect, and it was written with the purpose of revealing how a human soul is born to a new life.

The theme of "Resurrection" was a favourite one with Tolstoy. In most of his novels some of the characters pass through a process of spiritual awakening. After his "conversion," he had described in "Master and Workman" the sudden transformation of a brutal, hard-hearted master into a self-sacrificing Christian. In "Resurrection" he describes the new birth of a worldly and selfish aristocrat and of a degraded prostitute.

"Resurrection" is one of the rare instances of a novel which, whilst written with a thesis, yet remains a living masterpiece. Here again we observe the characteristic dissociation of the artist and of the preacher. The one is never merged in the other. The artist gives us his objective representation of

life, the teacher draws his own interpretation of it without interfering with the vision of reality. All the minor characters are strikingly true to life, with the exception, perhaps, of Toporof, who is a somewhat clumsy caricature of Pobiedonostseff. Even Nechludof and Maslova never leave one the impression of mere lay figures, and although Tolstoy is passionately interested in their conversion, he is never led astray by rhetoric or sentiment.

Whilst in "War and Peace" and in "Anna Karenina" there are several plots, there is only one in "Resurrection." Tolstoy here is true to the law of classical unity. At the same time we are confronted with a bewildering wealth of political and spiritual material. Knowing that this novel would probably be his last achievement in art, Tolstoy was bent on giving us his final message on practically every great problem which he had at heart. The problems of sex, of land reform, of prison

reform—the burning religious and social questions of the day—are all focussed in “Resurrection.”

The last part of the novel reminds us of Dostoievsky’s “House of the Dead.” The first part reminds us of Victor Hugo’s “Misérables.” Fantine is a prototype of Maslova and Jean Valjean of Nechcludof. Tolstoy had an unbounded admiration for “Les Misérables” and in “What is Art?” it is one of the few works which conform to his standard. But in the French novel the regeneration of Jean Valjean remains without any psychological explanation or even preparation. Jean Valjean receives from a Catholic bishop the sudden revelation of sanctity, and from beginning to end he never swerves from his rigid and stoic heroism. Moreover, the atmosphere of the “Misérables” is as romantic and unreal as in any of Dumas’ novels. In “Resurrection,” on the contrary, we can follow the gradual process

of spiritual awakening. The hero and the heroine remain subjected to all the temptations and to the complex influences of life. Jean Valjean is a superhuman puppet : Nechcludof and Maslova remain weak and struggling human beings.

In January 1902 he wrote an open letter to the Tsar, which was a scathing indictment of the oppression from which the Russian people were suffering under Nicholas II.

“With reference to autocracy, it may have been natural to Russians when they still believed the Tsar to be an infallible earthly deity, who himself personally ruled the people ; but it is far from natural now, when they all know—or, soon as they get a little education, will know—that, in the first place, a good Tsar is only *un heureux hasard* (a lucky accident), and that Tsars may be, and have been, monsters and maniacs, like John IV. and Paul ; and secondly, that however good



and wise a Tsar may be, he cannot possibly himself rule a nation of 130 million people, but that they are ruled by men who surround the Tsar, and who are more concerned about their own position than about the people's welfare.

“You will say that a Tsar can choose disinterested and good people to be his helpers. Unfortunately he cannot ; for he only knows some dozen of men, who by chance or intrigues have got near him and are careful to ward off from him all who might supplant them. So that a Tsar does not choose from the thousands of live, energetic, truly enlightened, and honourable folk, who feel drawn to public work, but only from those of whom Beaumarchais says : *Médiocre et rampant, et on parvient à tout.*” (Mediocre and cringing, one attains to everything.)

“Autocracy is an obsolete form of government which may suit the demands of people cut off from the world somewhere in Central

Africa, but not the demands of the Russian people, who are growing ever more and more enlightened by the enlightenment common to the whole world ; and therefore that form of government, and the orthodoxy bound up with it, can only be upheld (as is now being done) by violence of all kinds—a state of siege, banishments by administrative order, executions, religious persecution, the prohibition of books and newspapers, the perversion of education, and in general by all kinds of evil and cruel deeds.

“Such have hitherto been the actions of your reign : beginning with your reply to the Tver deputation—which provoked the indignation of the whole Russian people—when you called their most legitimate desires ‘insensate fancies’ ; all your regulations concerning Finland ; the Chinese seizures ; your project of a Hague Conference, which was accompanied by an increase in the army ; your restriction of self-government and

strengthening of administrative despotism; your consent to the institution of spirit-monopoly—that is, to the Government trading in poison which ruins the people; and finally your obstinacy in maintaining corporal punishment in spite of all representations made to you in favour of the abolition of that senseless and quite useless measure, disgraceful to the Russian people.

“Measures of coercion make it possible to oppress, but not to govern a people. Indeed, in our time the only means to govern the people is by placing oneself at the head of their movement from evil to good, from darkness to light, and by leading them towards the attainment of the objects nearest to that end.

“To be able to do that it is necessary, first of all, to let them express their wishes and needs; and having heard them, to fulfil those which respond to the demands, not of one class or section, but of the majority—the

mass of the working people."— (Aylmer Maude, II., 594.)

Hitherto Tolstoy had never taken an attitude of open hostility to the autocracy. It is very significant that in "War and Peace" Alexander I. is represented as an angel of peace, in striking contrast to Napoleon, who is the incarnation of the principle of evil. After the emancipation of the serfs Tolstoy claimed for Alexander II., and not for his advisers or for the leader of public opinion, the chief merit of the great deed of liberation. On the accession of Alexander III. he wrote a letter full of sympathy to the bereaved son, *and he did not once question the principle of absolute government.* It may be that until late in life Tolstoy remained unconsciously under the influence of his friends the Slavophiles, who held that autocracy, as a paternal, patriarchal form of government, was best adapted to the

needs of the Russian people, and that it was compatible with pure democracy. Certainly Tolstoy's sympathies were with an autocratic-democratic form of government rather than with parliamentary middle-class institutions.

For the first time, in his letter to the Tsar he denounced not only the abuses of the bureaucracy—he denied the very principle of the autocracy as a baneful anachronism.

When the revolutionary movement broke out in 1904 it was excusable if the Radicals did expect that the writer of the letter to the Tsar would be on their side, or at least that he would not oppose them. Tolstoy unwittingly and unwillingly admitted that, after all, forms of government were not a matter of indifference; that for good or evil they were a matter of supreme importance. He admitted that a constitutional change in Russia was absolutely necessary, but he would not resort to the only means which could bring about

the desirable consummation. Although a thinker, possessing a marvellous sense of the realities of external life and an almost miraculous insight into the realities of the spiritual life, once he came to discussing concrete politics, he observed and reasoned like a child. Once more one remembers the admission made in his youth: "I am not a man of politics. Politics I do not understand." He assumed that a monstrous evil like Tsardom, bound up with the vested interests of hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats and officials could be efficiently dealt with by eloquent appeals and proclamations and "Open Letters to the Tsar." The revolutionists, on the contrary, believed that such an evil could only be done away with by violent methods; and in the case of the revolutionists themselves those methods meant the heroic sacrifice of their lives and property. To minimize the bloodshed, to increase the chances of success, the revolutionists took

advantage of the temporary weakness of Tsardom paralyzed by the Japanese War, even as the Russian reformers had done fifty years before after the disasters of the Crimean War. Tolstoy attacked them both for their deeds, because they were violent, and for their words because they were impotent, forgetting that the words were impotent mainly because they were not followed up with violent deeds. History will not judge the Russian revolutionists as Tolstoy judged them. History will condemn the Constitutional Democrats or Cadets, not because they have been too violent and too daring, not because they believed too much in deeds, but rather because they trusted too much in words and manifestations.

Whatever one may think of Tolstoy's attitude during the revolution, it did require heroic courage and an absolute contempt of popularity to face the revolutionary leaders in the very hour of their temporary triumph,

and he had to pay the full penalty for his courage. Only recently the ideal of the intellectualists, he was all through the revolutionary crisis one of the best-hated men in the Russian empire. For eighteen months he preached in the wilderness : nobody would listen to him who had betrayed the popular cause in the hour of need.

Yet, entirely dismissing the moral issue and arguing the question merely on grounds of expediency, Tolstoy's condemnation of the methods of the revolutionists was, in one point of view, perfectly intelligible, and was inspired by profound political wisdom and a clear vision of the political situation. Insurrection is only justifiable when there is a large probability of success. If there are overwhelming odds against it, it can only result in useless bloodshed which itself results in ultimately strengthening reaction. An abortive revolution is only a riot, and a riot can only be dignified into a revolution when it is suc-



cessful. There is a revolutionary statesmanship which calculates the forces of freedom and the forces of resistance. The Russian revolutionists, composed mainly of aristocrats and university professors, were pre-eminently lacking in that statesmanship which characterized a Mirabeau and a Danton.\* Hypnotized by formulas and constitutional doctrines, they assumed that a great political movement is ultimately decided by manifestoes and speeches and public meetings. Had their political insight been equal to their enthusiasm, and to their rhetorical or parliamentary ability, they would have from the first appealed to the people, to the army, and to the Church. The procession of "Bloody Sunday," in January 1905, had proved that the people were ready to respond to leaders in whom they trusted, like Father Gapon.

\* I have developed this point in my essay, "The French Revolution and the Russian Revolution." Mr. Maurice Baring emphasizes the same "lesson" of the Russian Revolution in his excellent book, "The Russian People."

The extraordinary audacity and the success of the mutiny of the *Kniaz Patiomkine*—probably unique in the history of civil war—showed what a few daring men could achieve, determined to sacrifice their lives and position, and possessed of the gift of organization. But the Russian revolutionists failed to appeal to the people, they failed to win over the army, and they despised to win over the Church. Instead of fighting the battle in the streets, they fought the battle in newspaper offices, in political conventicles, and later on in the Duma.\*

From the first Tolstoy saw what would be the inevitable and disastrous end of the movement. When the Press of the whole world was espousing the cause of the revolutionists, and was predicting their triumph and the fall of Tsardom, Tolstoy was one of the very few who clearly saw that the

\* I do not know of a more extraordinary document in parliamentary literature than the four quarto volumes (in Russian) containing the stenographic account of the first of the second Duma proceedings.

revolution was destined to be abortive, that all the bloodshed was useless, *and that the intellectuals had not the people behind them.*

He clearly realized that no revolution could succeed in Russia which was not both religious and economic. The religious revolution he had already been preaching for twenty years. He now devoted himself to the preaching of the economic revolution. For several years past he had become acquainted with the works of Henry George, and Georgeism now became to him the only way to salvation. We need not discuss here whether in advocating a great economic reform he was not illogical. As we stated before, anybody who goes far enough in the study of Tolstoy will soon cease troubling whether he is logical or not. The really important question is that when he started to advocate land nationalization he was far less Utopian and far less of a visionary than he had generally been in his political propa-

ganda. For it must be admitted that if Henry George is ever to receive a fair trial he has a far better chance to get it in the Russian empire than in any other country. And this is because not only is the land question more important in Russia than in any other country, and because ninety per cent. of the people are still tillers of the soil, but also because in Russia alone would the Government have the power to carry out such a huge scheme of land reform. It must be remembered that fifty years ago Alexander II. achieved an agrarian revolution even more complicated and more extensive than would be to-day a drastic scheme of land nationalization. And the reform of 1863 has been accepted as an unqualified success both by Conservatives and Liberals.

Alas ! the Grand Old Man was not destined to see the realization of his dreams. When the Government finally succeeded in

crushing the revolution, as Tolstoy predicted they would, they were in no mood to undertake any large scheme of agrarian reform. The opportunity had been lost, and is not likely soon to return.

If outward success were the measure of greatness and achievement, Tolstoy's political and social propaganda ought to add little to his fame, for it was an almost unqualified failure. His denunciation of war did not prevent the Russo-Japanese slaughter. His denunciation of the revolution did not prevent the massacre in the streets. But posterity will not pause to consider whether his contemporaries listened to his message any more than we to-day consider whether the Florentines turned a deaf ear to the appeals of Dante or Savonarola. What posterity will consider is the magnificent revelation of a heroic personality which defied all opinion—the spectacle of the Grand Old Man who, in the face of obloquy, con-

tinued to hold before the people a high ideal of humanity. It is that revelation which Tolstoy has given to the world, and which will be an inspiration long after many of the causes for which he fought have been forgotten.\*

In the words of Montaigne : "*Il y a des défaites triomphantes à l'envi des victoires.*"

The failures of dreamers like Tolstoy are more constructive and more glorious than the successes of practical statesmen.

\* This point is touched upon in Mr. Roosevelt's shallow and pompous article in the *Outlook*, 1909.

## Chapter X

### PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF A VISIT TO YASNAYA POLYANA

I VISITED Tolstoy at the end of May 1905, a few weeks before the greatest naval disaster of the Russo-Japanese War. It was one of the darkest moments in the whole of Russian history, and it was an unique moment in the life of Tolstoy. The Russian Government seemed to be brought to bay. The revolutionary forces were preparing for a final struggle. In that struggle every revolutionist was looking towards Yasnaya Polyana, and was depending on the support of a hermit of the old prophet. We held the opinion—that when that support was withdrawn, when, so far from encouraging the

Radical and Socialist parties, Tolstoy began to denounce their methods as fiercely as ever he had denounced the autocracy, the disappointment and indignation were universal. From the beginning of the war until the triumph of reaction again brought him into conflict with the Government, Tolstoy became in the eyes of the intellectual classes a traitor to the people and a reactionary in disguise.

But a people, and especially a people in revolution, cannot live without a hero to worship. The younger generation instantly transferred their admiration and allegiance from Tolstoy to his great rival Maxim Gorki. One month before my pilgrimage to Yasnaya Polyana I had been present in the Crimea at a triumphal manifestation in honour of Gorki. On his release from prison he had been holding court on the Russian Riviera at Yalta. From Yalta I had the good fortune to sail with him and



Mrs. Andreieva for Sevastopol. I had seen the crowds acclaiming the popular hero, and the deputations of students bringing flowers and holding speeches. I had heard the guns fired on his departure. He was the hero of the hour,\* whilst far away in the heart of Russia the old prophet was preaching in the desert, and hurling forth denunciations, and preaching a message to which nobody would listen. At the end of his long life, like the strong man of Ibsen, he stood alone. To him might be applied the famous lines in the "Moïse" of De Vigny :—

*" Je suis, Seigneur, hélas ! puissant et solitaire,  
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre."*

My visit to Tolstoy, therefore, happened at a particularly interesting moment. The approach from Toula was through an excellent road. If the Russian nation are ever destined to acquire that historical sense of which to-day they are entirely devoid, they

\* He has now been for five years an exile in Capri.

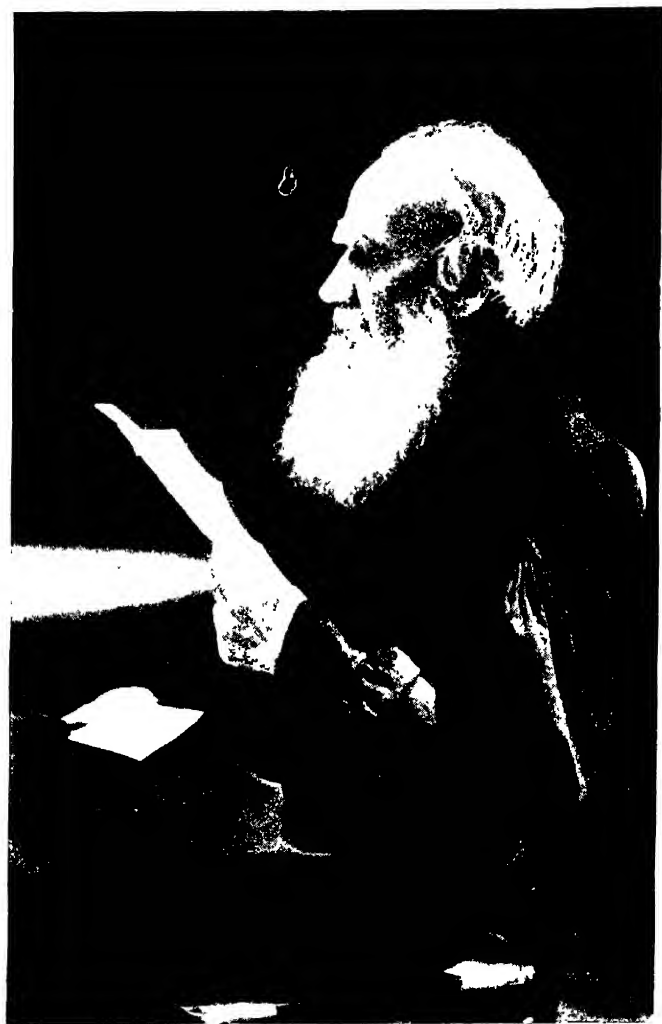
may one day call this road the Via Tolstoyana, as the Romans had their Via Appiana and Claudiana. For the road to Yasnaya mainly existed for the use of Tolstoyan pilgrims.

Roads in Russia generally are in a shocking condition. They are nothing but indefinite tracks through the infinite steppe, and no London cabman would venture the life of his fare on any one of them. But the Russian Government, with the instinct of self-advertisement which characterizes it, understood that it was quite worth while to spend a good deal of money to keep this particular highway in decent repair. The many thousands of writers, publicists, and journalists who came to Yasnaya Polyana from every quarter of the globe would judge of all the highways of the Russian Empire by this one "Via Tolstoyana," the only one they would ever be likely to use.

From Toula the traveller is taken through

undulating and picturesque country which had been partly reclaimed from the primeval forest. Industry was rapidly transforming the district. Huge chimneys, the steeples of the modern religion of science, were arising in every direction. On the way we saw an enormous structure in flaming red brick belonging to a Belgian company, only recently erected, and already abandoned and desolate. It seemed as if within a radius of several miles around Yasnaya Polyana, the *genius loci* was still protecting the country against the encroachments of industrialism.

Several miles from my destination I espied a horseman coming in my direction. From the likeness to the portrait of Tolstoy, familiar to all the world, I surmised that the figure moving towards me must be one of the sons who had been sent out to meet me. As I drew near, the erect, youthful figure on horseback proved to be none other than the octogenarian prophet himself.





One was struck by the extraordinary vigour and alertness and the prodigious vitality of the man. Less than two years before, for several months he had been at death's door. But his many severe illnesses hardly seemed to have left a trace on his mighty frame. Yet the very fact of his frequent ill-health proved that he did not owe his physical strength, any more than he owed his moral strength, to Nature alone. He would say himself that he retained his health because he had led a natural and abstemious life, and because he had always kept clear of doctors. But in reality he owed his recuperative powers to constant training and discipline, to a strenuous existence, to systematic exercise. All through life he had been fond of manual labour, of sport, and especially of riding. From his youth he had been a mighty hunter before the Lord. In the Caucasus he had vied with the Cossacks in feats of horsemanship. After he married he went in for horse-breed-

ing. On his Samara estate he kept a stud, and delighted in organizing races for the people. All readers of Tolstoy will remember the important place which the horse occupies in his works. They will remember the death of the horse in the "Three Deaths," and the marvellous chapters describing the races in "Anna Karenina." In his fitful fever of self-renunciation Tolstoy some years ago had temporarily given up riding, as he had already given up hunting, smoking, and attending concerts: but it was pointed out to him that riding was absolutely essential to his health, and he reluctantly resumed his favourite sport; and now, at eighty years of age, on alternate days he would take a walk or a ride.

The Master received me with that mixture of courtesy and dignity which revealed the aristocrat. Yet in the rugged and manly features, in the strong build, in the prominent nose, in the protruding cheek bones, he embodied the striking Russian type of

the common people. For eighty years the nobleman had lived with the peasants, and he had become one of them; and he now appeared in his physical aspect as the glorified moujik ploughing the field: and it is in the smock and the top boots of the moujik that the brush of Gay and Riepine has represented him for posterity.

Notwithstanding the cordiality of the reception, and the expression of kindness and sympathy, the first impression was somewhat forbidding. I distinctly felt ill at ease. One shrunk from the stern and piercing glance of the deep-set eyes under the thick bushy brows: one seemed to feel that one was being weighed in the moral balance, and that one was found wanting. The Florentines, when they saw Dante passing by, would point at him as at the man who had penetrated the secrets of the world below. One felt something of the same feeling in the presence of Tolstoy.

He offered to lead the way back. Know-



ing that he was taking his constitutional ride, I insisted on being allowed to continue alone. The troika soon reached the entrance gates of the estate. Not without emotion did I pass between the two historical pillars, crumbling in ruins. One realized that every square inch was hallowed by the presence and activity of one of the noblest of our race ; that here, for three-quarters of a century, he had toiled and struggled, suffered and conquered.

As his detractors have never been tired of contrasting the luxury of his surroundings with the austerity of his doctrines, I expected to find a sumptuous manor-house. The mansion was, indeed, a spacious and solid one-storied structure, but it suggested little of luxury, or even of comfort—at least according to English standards. The tumbledown condition of the house rather reminded me of the House of Usher in one of Edgar Poe's tales. The furniture was of a severe simplicity, which would disgust an English shop-

keeper of the lower classes. The Master's bedroom was as bare as a monastic cell.

I was received at the entrance by Countess Tolstoy. She impressed one at first sight as a woman of extraordinary strength of character, as well as of keen intellect. Her calm yet mobile countenance showed fewer traces than one would have expected of the strenuous life which had been hers. Her simple, cheerful, animated manner, in striking contrast with that of her husband, at once put me at my ease. Any one who has travelled in Russia must be struck with the delightful frankness and intimacy of the Russian manner, so different from the Anglo-Saxon reticence and reserve. That frankness and cordiality reveal themselves even in the forms of language ; for in Russia you are addressed not by your surname, but by your Christian name and by the name of your father. In England it would be indiscreet to talk to a chance acquaintance

on his private concerns. The Russian realizes that even in ordinary social intercourse, in order to establish at once a pleasant and profitable relationship to each other, it is necessary that we should be enlightened as fully as possible about our personal circumstances and difficulties, our tastes and interests, our doubts and convictions. And if the Russian does not know all he wants to know about you, he will not have the slightest scruple in cross-examining you. After five minutes' conversation with Countess Tolstoy the ice was broken ; we had ceased to be strangers. After an hour she had told me her life story : her forty-three years of marriage, her sixteen children, her joys and sorrows. Although she looked much younger than her age, and although her every glance and movement testified to a superabundant vitality, she declared she was tired and depressed and that the burden was too much for her. " It is about time I should rest a little,"

she said. "*J'ai bien le droit de m'amuser un peu.*" Her thoughts constantly reverted to the war. "*Bella matribus detestata !*" Her son André had just returned from the front, wounded and trepanned. "This war is driving me mad." She cursed the Government. "I never was a revolutionist," she protested, "but I have become one against my will"—a phrase I would hear almost every day in the course of the five months I spent in Russia.

Besides the younger son and daughter—and besides Dr. Makoviczy, the resident doctor and secretary, who accompanied Tolstoy on his last tragic journey—several other guests were staying at Yasnaya. Amongst them was the presiding Judge of the Supreme Court of Moscow, the late Mr. Davidof. He invited me to attend at the house of Prince X. a private political conventicle against the Government. I could not help feeling the exquisite humour of a Chief

Justice who was visiting on intimate terms the fiery opponent of all official judges and official justice, and who asked an absolute stranger to be present at a secret conspiracy against the existing Government, whose servant he was.

Walking round the estate, one received everywhere the same impression of dilapidation. Everything seemed to have returned to a state of Nature. Vast orchards with thousands of apple trees were covered with mildew, and did not yield one apple. In the park the paths almost disappeared under the weeds. Visiting the cottages, one again received the same impression of neglect. Monsieur Leroy-Beaulieu, who was at Yasnaya Polyana about the same time, tells us that he was favourably impressed with some of the peasant dwellings, if one took into account the low standard of housing among the rural classes. He points out that some of the cottages even had a fireplace and a bedstead,

and that some peasants were actually able to sleep, as in Europe, in a bed, instead of sleeping as usual on the oven of the Izba. I must confess that, notwithstanding the occasional luxury of a bed, most of the cottages I saw seemed little better than hovels, and that the condition of the peasants themselves seemed pretty miserable. With all his interest in and admiration for the peasant, Tolstoy obviously did not believe in model peasant dwellings, and he did not think that a high standard of living was necessary to a peasant's happiness. I still see before me the pathetic figure of an old soldier in rags, who had been with Tolstoy in the Crimean War, piteously begging Dr. Makoviczy for a remedy to relieve his sufferings.

Dinner at Count Tolstoy's was a curious sight. In summer the table was generally spread in the open air under the huge veranda stretching alongside one whole wing of the mansion. The ladies appeared in

evening dress ; the master in a white peasant smock. Dinner was served by two valets in livery and gloves of a doubtful white—a concession to female *protocole* which Tolstoy must have felt very acutely, and which produced a strange impression on the stranger. The service was excellent, the cooking exquisite, and the company in high spirits.

Tolstoy was rather an inspiring talker than a good conversationalist. Conversation rather took the form of a monologue than of a dialogue. Long spells of silence would be suddenly broken by bursts of impressive talk. He had lost the aggressive manner, the withering sarcasm, which in former days used to goad Turgenief into fury. He allowed perfect freedom, and constantly invited questions ; yet real argument was entirely out of the question. Not that in the long run he could not be moved by argument. He might change his opinions (and he often did change his opinions), but those opinions of

yesterday soon crystallized into convictions, and the crystallizing process only took place as the result of intellectual or moral conflict.

I had been careful to avoid raising those burning political questions which I was most anxious to hear discussed. I knew that the Count and Countess and the children did not hold the same opinions. But once more I was made to realize that in Russia expression of opinion is more untrammelled than with us, and I found that the conversation gravitated to the inevitable topics of the war and the revolution.

A young journalist, freshly arrived from Moscow, was denouncing the criminal folly of the Government—its treachery, its cruelty, its baseness—in granting concessions which were extracted by violence, and withdrawing those concessions as soon as the hurricane had blown past. After one of these denunciations the Master remained plunged in meditation. I ventured to break in upon



his thoughts, and asked him why in the face of such daily horrors he could remain silent and did not appeal to public opinion. He turned to me his eagle eye, and replied in a low, slow voice: "Young man, when an old man like myself is on the eve of going to his account, all things political appear as supremely insignificant and indifferent."

But this indifference was only on the surface. Half an hour later the prophet gave himself the lie to his strange utterance, and with an impassioned, tremulous voice he read to his guests a long paper called "Our Sin"—advocating a drastic reform of the land system on the lines of Henry George. The land question had been the one question which for several years had filled the mind of the Master. He who forty years before, in the days of the great agrarian reforms of Alexander II., had shown himself so strangely indifferent—he who somewhat later had been adding thousands of acres to his already vast

estates—had now come to realize that the agrarian question was the one supreme question. It is true that most of the revolutionary leaders saw this quite as clearly, and felt it quite as strongly, as Tolstoy himself. Any reader of the stenographic reports of the proceedings of the first Duma can satisfy himself that agrarian reform was in the forefront of the Radical programme. But, as always happened with Tolstoy, nothing short of the one simple, absolute, immediate remedy of land nationalization was acceptable to him. Because the Radicals did not accept this they stood condemned.

His conversation with me wandered over many topics. When he heard that I had been lecturing for many years at the University of Edinburgh on the philosophy of Rousseau, he burst out in an enthusiastic eulogy of the great Genevese. He reminded me how much he himself owed to Jean Jacques, and how much the world could still

learn from him. He cross-examined me on the condition of England and Scotland, for which countries he had no very particular sympathy, and of whose immediate future he was not very hopeful. He was not astonished to hear that the movement in favour of land nationalization was not making much progress.\* One could gather that he had a bias against England, and that he took his English impressions second-hand from refugees and revolutionists. He was an omnivorous reader, but strangely uncritical. He spoke in the same breath, and with the same persuasion, of Ruskin's "Letters to Working Men," of Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities," and of Morrison's "Annals of the Poor," which he declared to be a masterpiece. Like most men of genius, he would take from the books he read only those arguments and those facts which harmonized with or which strengthened his own thesis.

\* This was before the advent of Mr. Lloyd-George.

He spoke bitterly of the English Church—"the great lying Church"—and referred to its origin and history, to its foundation by the "bloated monster" Henry VIII., and to its long alliance with the oppressors of the people. It was obvious that he had far more sympathy with his own cruel Church which had excommunicated him. He continued to feel with the simple faith of the poor people. He spoke lovingly of the vagrants, many of whom would visit the manor-house, and of the *palomniki* or pilgrims who would tramp over two hundred versts to the nearest shrine.

He explained to me at great length the political philosophy of the Slavophiles; and although that philosophy had been exploited by such reactionaries as Katkof and Pobiedonostseff, and was itself clearly conservative, Tolstoy dwelt on the elements of truth which it contained. Curiously enough, when I was taking leave, he still reverted to the subject. "I am glad you are going

to make a special study of Russia, but if you want to understand us you must grasp the principles of the Slavophiles." It seemed strange to me then that the last words of the great revolutionary thinker should be a recommendation to take as my guides through the maze of Russian politics the conservative thinkers of Slavism. The explanation to-day, after years of close study, seems to me that Tolstoy, wide and universal and cosmopolitan as were his interests, and strongly as he had spoken against patriotism, remained himself at heart a patriot and a nationalist, and that his thoughts more and more centred round his own country. And especially now, when his country was threatened with a great upheaval in the name of so-called Western civilization, and under the influence of alien principles, he was thrown back on his Russian preconceptions and sympathies, and he asserted himself as a Russian of the Russians.

## Chapter XI

### A SURGICAL OPERATION AT YASNAYA POLYANA.

#### *Reminiscences of a Russian Surgeon.*

THE following reminiscences by Professor Wassili Feodorof Snegiref, the distinguished gynecologist of the University of Petersburg, who some years ago operated upon Countess Tolstoy, gives us a vivid glimpse of Tolstoy in his domestic relations at a great crisis of his life. The evidence is unimpeachable, because the eminent surgeon is a keen and impartial and yet sympathetic observer; and the evidence is invaluable, because at such tragic moments the inmost character of a man reveals itself. The painful scene shows how completely he had

become detached from the affairs of this world. The attitude of the great novelist by the bedside of her who had been the companion of his life for nearly half a century is a striking illustration of the inhumanity which is sometimes produced in the most tender and in the noblest natures by a perverted view of religion. The indifference, and we might almost say the callousness, of Tolstoy to his wife's agonizing sufferings, and his plea in favour of the purifying influence of suffering, remind one of Pascal's famous pages on "Illness as the natural state of the Christian." It reminds one of many a death-bed scene in Roman Catholic countries, where the father confessor forgets all human and humane concerns, only thinking of his religious ministrations.

"On my arrival at Yasnaya Polyana I found Countess Sopha Andrejewna Tolstoy in acute

pain. The Countess's suffering could not be allayed either by hot poultices nor by cocaine or atropine. The invalid was screaming day and night. In the house everything was in disorder. From the few words which I exchanged with Count Tolstoy I acquired the conviction that he had given up hope, and that he considered the death of the patient as inevitable. On examination I was disposed to assume that there was a 'cyst,' which made an operation necessary, and I turned to Tolstoy's son André with the request to send off a telegram summoning my assistants from Moscow. I told the husband and the children that my diagnosis was not quite certain, but that I considered it as very probable that there had formed itself an ulcerating cyst. I then explained to Tolstoy the causes and the process of the disease.

"He said: 'That is interesting. Yes, yes, that must be the right explanation!'



“I returned with Dr. Polilow into my room, and we discussed the proposed operation. Dr. Polilow suggested a consultation, and we decided to summon Professor Phenomenow from St. Petersburg. André talked with his father, and then returned with his sister and her husband. They said that their father and the whole family were against our proposal; that they had full confidence in me; and that they did not think that the new consultation was necessary. I repeated my suggestion, and I advised not to reject the opinion of an outside and impartial authority. ‘My diagnosis is not certain. Perhaps new circumstances may arise which might make the operation unnecessary. In this way we would avoid what seems to you so terrible.’ Finally they agreed, and the telegram to Professor Phenomenow was dispatched.

“From our calculations, he could arrive in the night from Friday to Saturday, and the

final decision could be taken on Saturday. On Friday the state of the patient got worse. The pain did not abate. The temperature rose, and threatening symptoms of peritonitis appeared. We passed the time in great anxiety.

“When I awoke at six o'clock next morning, I learned that Professor Phenomenow had not yet arrived. The state of the patient had not changed for the better since the previous evening.

“I examined the Countess with the other doctors, and found that the operation was absolutely necessary, and could not be postponed. If the intestines were not soon relieved, the operation would become impossible, and death inevitable.

“The doctors agreed with my diagnosis. I informed the family. I then said to the children: ‘If the patient is not at once operated, she must die; and, however invaluable the assistance of my colleague

might have been, I am compelled to proceed at once with the operation.

“The patient was moaning all this time; and crying that she could not continue to live with these awful sufferings.

“‘I implore you to operate me at once,’ she said.

“I went to Tolstoy and told him that the operation must take place immediately.

“He replied : ‘*I look at the position of my wife with great sorrow. She is dangerously ill. The great solemn moment of death approaches, which reconciles and pacifies us all. We must submit to the will of God. I am against surgical intervention, because it disturbs the sublime act of death. We must all die to-day, to-morrow, perhaps in five years. I understand you cannot act otherwise. I myself am out of the question. I am neither for nor against. Let the children assemble. My eldest son, Sergius, is also arriving. Let them decide. In*

addition, of course, ask the patient if she has anything against it. Do what you like.'

"I replied : 'Perhaps the operation is not necessary, but show me a means of delivering the patient from her sufferings. I know no other means but the operation.'

"Tolstoy replied : '*Suffering is necessary. It prepares us for the great moment of Death.*'

"I said : 'Let us stop this discussion. I have not come here to convince you. I only wanted to communicate to you my opinion, which has now become a final decision. I am going to see the patient and ask her, and I pray you to do the same.'

"Tolstoy left, and returned with the information that the patient agreed to the operation. The children also declared the operation to be necessary. Tolstoy had told them the same which he had told me.

"After the operation was over, on leaving

the room, I met Tolstoy, who was pale and gloomy, but otherwise seemed composed—almost indifferent. He saw the cyst which I was carrying away, and he asked quite calmly : ‘ Is it all finished ? Is that what you have removed ? ’

“ After changing my clothes I returned upstairs into the dining-room, where I drew up a statement of the operation with Dr. Gaitschmann.

“ When a little later I again met Tolstoy he said to me that he had little hope of a favourable result, as the patient was again complaining of pain, and asserted that she suffered quite as much as before the operation. It seemed as if her body had been torn to pieces.

“ Besides Tolstoy nobody was allowed to see the patient. He asked me : ‘ Have you not made the operation in vain ? ’ I replied : ‘ The position is serious, but surely it is better than before the operation.’

“Before eight o'clock Professor Phenomenow arrived. At table I was seated next to Tolstoy. In front of me was Professor Phenomenow. Conversation turned on general topics, not on the health of the Countess. Tolstoy was serious, but he ate with his usual appetite, and he was endeavouring to appear amiable to his new guest.

“On Sunday morning the state of the patient had visibly improved. Professor Phenomenow brought this good news to the family. Tolstoy remained calm, but seemed very happy.

“After we had discussed every eventuality, Professor Phenomenow departed, and he received from Tolstoy as a remembrance one of his last writings, with a dedication.

“When, four days after the operation, I said ‘good-bye’ to Tolstoy he was alone in his study. He was wearing his ordinary morning dress and was reading. He looked gloomy, and received me with monosyllables.

I described to him the position of the patient, and told him that professional duties called me away. He remained seated and silent, nor did he rise when I took leave, but turning half round, reached out his hand and murmured in his beard a few polite words. His manner depressed me. He was obviously in bad humour. Yet neither myself nor any of the assistants had given any cause for such discontent. Perhaps after all his bad spirits were imputable to exhaustion.

“ A violent inner conflict had been raging in his soul. One half of his being was going to be taken away from him. The unity of his life was going to be destroyed. One day he had said to the patient : ‘ Here thou art lying in bed. I do not see thee going about. I do not hear thy step in the house. I cannot write nor read.’ And when he visited her after the operation a touching tenderness was speaking in his glance and his voice whilst he was bantering with her.

“Into his quiet, equable existence something strange and hostile had crept. A crowd of outsiders were putting the whole mansion topsy-turvy, and compelled all to think only of the operation, and to talk about it. And always and everywhere one heard nothing but the moaning and the screaming of the patient. A dark fate was hanging over the house and was depressing all present. Tolstoy had been staying away from the children. He would go out into the park and pray. What must his soul have endured in this solitude? That a painful feeling should survive and turn against the chief culprit—the operator—was intelligible.

“One month after I was back again at Yasnaya Polyana. I saw the friendly children, the Countess, and the hospitable host. Tolstoy received me with fascinating amiability, quite like ‘a gentleman.’ His manner of speaking was modest, distinguished, and extraordinarily friendly. I



seemed to see before me Tolstoy as he was in his youth. The difference between this Tolstoy and the old Tolstoy, as he appeared to me when I was taking leave, was so great that I said to myself: 'As he is now he will not show himself again to you. But this last impression of Tolstoy nobody can take away from you. It remains your possession for ever.' "

## Chapter XII

### THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS OF TOLSTOY \*

#### *The Forged Coupon and Other Stories.*

THE publication of the posthumous works of Tolstoy by Messrs. Nelson bids fair to be the most conspicuous literary event of the year of grace 1911. By securing the copyright of those writings the publishers have made one of those lucky hauls which do not often occur in a lifetime. The first volume was issued at the end of November, simultaneously in English and in French, both in the "Collection Nelson" and in Messrs. Nelson's Series of Two-Shilling

\* Tolstoy: "The Forged Coupon," etc., Messrs. Nelson. 2s.—Tolstoy: "Le faux Coupon," etc., "Collection Nelson." 1s.

Novels. It contains, besides several shorter tales, two long stories, "The Forged Coupon" and the "Devil," \* and a drama in six acts, "The Man who was Dead." The second volume contains a scene of Russian clerical life, "Father Sergius," and an autobiographical drama of extraordinary interest, "The Light that Shines in Darkness," describing most vividly his own domestic struggles.

In nine cases out of ten the publication of posthumous writings is a dangerous experiment, adding little credit to the publisher. When it is not a purely commercial speculation, it too often results in the indiscriminate emptying of private drawers, which ought never to have been emptied, or it is prompted by blind hero-worship and relic-hunting. *A priori* there is indeed a strong presumption against the quality of "posthumous" writings. They

\* The "Devil" only appears in the French edition.

are only "posthumous" in the sense that the author himself, in his wiser judgment, has rejected them whilst he lived; and it is a bare truism to say that, where purely literary productions are concerned, the author would not have withheld his work from an appreciative public if he had thought them worthy of publication.

But the case of Tolstoy must be judged on its own merits, for the circumstances are truly without a parallel. After his conversion Tolstoy the artist was deliberately sacrificed to Tolstoy the teacher. Henceforth, to use the expression of Nietzsche, Tolstoy transvalued all his moral values. He looked upon his former artistic life as futile. He condemned his masterpieces as mischievous. He ceased to write fiction, or, as the Russians call it, "poetry," except on rare occasions, and only in order to raise money for some great cause in need of support (for example, "Resurrection"), or in order to drive

home more vividly and more forcibly those truths which he had at heart (for example, "Kreutzer Sonata"). More and more, as time went on and as his religious conscience became more sensitive, he abstained from pure and disinterested literature. He saw in a purely literary activity a dangerous snare which lured him into vanity, and drew him away from the more important tasks of his life. At intervals more and more distant the "demon" of poetry might still seize hold of him, and he might still, in a moment of weakness, indulge an irresistible artistic impulse; but after having sinned he would almost immediately repent, and hide away his production in some hidden drawers of his study at Yasnaya Polyana. This tragedy of self-effacement and self-renunciation—this voluntary mutilation of the greatest creative artist since Shakespeare—is almost unique in the history of world literature; and when we feel inclined to accuse the

Russian prophet of the glaring contradictions between his theories and his practice—when we accuse him of never having learned to the full those lessons of sacrifice and self-surrender which he was always preaching—we must not forget these extraordinary and repeated acts of artistic suicide, that deliberate suppression of his masterpieces, which after all to a born “man of letters” like Tolstoy must have been the supreme sacrifice.

As Tolstoy eventually came only to publish those few stories which had a direct moral object, and systematically withheld those which had a purely artistic purpose, the chances obviously are that it is not the most imperfect but rather the most perfect works which must have been sacrificed, and we may safely assert, *a priori*, that we are more likely than not to find amongst his posthumous writings some of the finest masterpieces of his later period.

I submit that this is pre-eminently true of

at least three of the compositions contained in the volume before us. It is pre-eminently true of the "Devil." We may plausibly surmise that Tolstoy rejected it partly because its artistic qualities were independent of any ulterior didactic purpose, and partly because he was not sufficiently sure of the moral effect it might produce. It is perhaps a similar reason which explains the exclusion of this masterpiece from the English edition, an exclusion deeply to be regretted. For the "Devil" is one of the boldest and one of the most realistic tales which he has ever written. It is a puritanic drama of sexual obsession. As he grew older the problem of sex increasingly haunted the stern moralist, and his ideas moved more and more in the direction of absolute and almost Oriental asceticism. The "Devil" may be taken as a sequel to the "Kreutzer Sonata." Like Koznijew, Irtenief is possessed of the Evil One (whence the title). As in the "Sonata," so in the

present story we have the tragedy of a noble and useful life wrecked by indulgence to passion. And, like the "hero" of the "Sonata," Irtenief is more sinned against than sinning. He is the victim of the laxity and immorality of his surroundings.

If it is easy to understand why the "Devil" should have been withheld, and why it should only see the light twenty-two years after it was written, it is more difficult to account for the suppression of the "Forged Coupon." If ever there was a tale written with a moral purpose, and teaching a vital moral truth, the "Forged Coupon" is pre-eminently such a tale. There is an elemental law in the physical world which has become the foundation of modern science—the law of the conservation of energy: nothing is lost in Nature, neither an atom of matter nor a moment of energy. The "Forged Coupon" is the application to the moral world of that law of the conservation



of energy. It teaches that our most trivial and insignificant acts continue to produce their effects, and to develop until infinity their fatal consequences for good and evil. In the novel a schoolboy of fifteen, Mitia Smokovnikov, the son of a high official, in order to repay a few roubles, the price of a theatre ticket, which he has borrowed, is induced to forge a coupon by putting a " 1 " before the " 2 " of a 2.50 rouble note. He passes the coupon on to a retail shopkeeper who himself passes it on to a poor peasant, Ivan Mironov. When charged by the peasant, the shopkeeper denies all knowledge of the fact, and he gets his servant, Vassily, to bear false witness, with the result that the servant is morally ruined by his perjurer, and that the peasant is himself accused of the forgery. Ivan is dishonoured, and takes to evil courses. And so the process of moral contamination goes on to the end of the story, and the apparently insignificant act of

a thoughtless schoolboy produces a dire crop of moral disasters, shaking society to its foundations. The evil works and spreads in concentric circles, resulting in deeds of treachery and violence, of burglary and murder. In thus showing the awful logic and concatenation of sin, the author brings before us one aspect after another of Russian life, and one type after another of Russian society. Peasants and merchants, land-owners and priests, politicians and high officials, pass in rapid succession. Yet they remain stamped on our imagination in indelible touches.

As the story has never been completed, and stands only before us as an imposing "torso," in the mere qualities of form, in unity and arrangement, it is undoubtedly inferior to the finished compositions of Tolstoy. But in the wealth of material, in the working out of the details, it will deservedly rank amongst the great achieve-

ments of the poet. It reveals once more that extraordinary dissociation of the artist and of the preacher, which is one of the most striking characteristics of Tolstoy after his conversion. The one never obtrudes himself on the other. The unrivalled anatomist of the soul only seems careful of describing human life and searching human motives with relentless sincerity.

From a merely literary point of view the most important part of the new volume is the realistic drama, "The Man who was Dead" (1900). It will be put on a level with the "Powers of Darkness," and it goes far to show that the man who wrote his first dramatic masterpiece in bed in a few days, whilst recovering from a mortal illness, and who wrote his second at seventy years of age, might, if he had chosen, have achieved supreme greatness as a dramatist. "The Man who was Dead," unlike the "Powers of Darkness" is not written with any definite

moral end, and that again probably explains why in later years Tolstoy lost all interest in its production. The subject is a dual one. It may be called both a tragedy of divorce and a tragedy of Bohemianism. The "hero," Fedia, has deserted his wife and child, and has squandered his substance with gipsy girls. Characteristically enough, here again Tolstoy in his drama is working out autobiographical materials, for the story of Fedia is largely the story of Tolstoy's own brother. Lisa, the wife of Fedia, continues to love him, and entreats him to return to her; but he refuses, and in order to give a father and a protector to her baby she is prevailed upon to accept the love and devotion of her life-long friend Victor Karenin, a noble-hearted, high-principled, conservative and orthodox Russian of the old school. Fedia, conscious of his own guilt, and being at heart an honest man, accepts the situation. 'He gives his wife

back her liberty. But he refuses to comply with the vexatious and hypocritical procedure of the divorce laws of the Greek Church, and he prefers to put an end to a distracting position by disappearing. He pretends to commit suicide, and his clothes are found near a pond where he is supposed to have drowned himself. Lisa and Victor Karenin are now free to contract a legal marriage. Unfortunately, through the indiscretion of a blackmailer, the secret leaks out. The wife and the second husband are accused of bigamy, and of conniving in the disgraceful comedy played by Fedia, in order to escape from the necessity of divorce. The two husbands and the wife are traduced before a criminal court. Fedia, who has sunk to the last stage of degradation, wishes to atone for his guilt. He shoots himself, and thus finally liberates Lisa and Karenin.

Altogether, this first volume of the posthumous works of Tolstoy is perhaps the

most memorable contribution to world literature which has been given to us in recent years, and its publication will be hailed with reverent admiration by all students of Russian letters. If any further evidence had been needed of the stupendous vitality of the Grand Old Man, this volume would have given it. If any new masterpiece could have added one cubit to the intellectual and moral stature of the giant of Yasnaya Polyana, this volume would have done so.

Every story, every dramatic scene, is a "chip from the old block." In every page we hear the true ring of the mighty Voice !

## Chapter XIII

### THE END

THE closing years of some great writers like Goethe, Victor Hugo, Tennyson, Emerson, are like the glory of a beautiful midsummer evening. The halo of public sympathy and admiration illumines their last days. Their sun is setting in serene peace and Olympian majesty. Laurel-crowned, they contemplate from a distance the battles of life in which they once took a part, and from which they so often carried off the spoils of victory. Their ripe wisdom has solved the problems which to immature youth seemed insoluble. They have ceased to be distracted by problems which in youth seemed all important. Slowly, deliberately,

they prepare for the supreme journey. Their death is euthanasia and the beginning of apotheosis.

Such were not to be the closing years of Tolstoy. Peace and harmony were not to be his lot. He had to fight his spiritual battles to the end. The aggressive temper never was stronger, nor his attitude more defiant.

At the same time, never did the heroic athlete seem further removed from final victory than in the last years of his strenuous existence. To him the times were out of joint. The creations of his art had, indeed, taken possession of the imagination of the civilized world, and had been added for all time to come to the common stock of our race. His personality wielded a spell and roused an universal interest which no other writer in the nineteenth century has evoked. But the fate of his books and the vanity of human glory had lost all



interest for him ; and what he did take to heart—his message, his social doctrine—the world took little heed of. So far from moving towards his ideals, the modern world got farther and farther away from them.

All the principles which in every country Radicals and progressives advocate were to Tolstoy hollow and contemptible. The progressives extolled the education of the people ; but to Tolstoy that education was poisonous and perverse, and lured the toilers away from the fields and from the communion with Nature. The progressives extolled arbitration and the limitation of armaments ; but nothing short of the total suppression of standing armies would satisfy Tolstoy. The progressives demanded free love and a relaxation of the marriage bond ; but Tolstoy wanted to revert to the puritanism and asceticism of the Gospel. The progressives proclaimed the joy of life ;

Tolstoy was haunted by the vision of sin and the obsession of death. As he got older, the Christian spirit seemed to become more uncompromising in him, and his attitude to life became more and more that of a mediæval monk. He welcomed illness as the best means of strengthening his spiritual consciousness. He put into practice the evangelical precept: "Take up thy cross daily and follow Me." And he tried not to disturb the mood of self-condemnation, meekness, and love in which his suffering had left him.

We have seen in a previous chapter that when the great revolution came Tolstoy found himself entirely isolated from the intellectual classes to which he belonged. But he was no less isolated from the toiling masses with which he desired to commune. All through life it had been one of his favourite doctrines, imbibed from Rousseau, that the artisan and the peasant had a much more

real understanding of life than the upper classes. For twenty-five years he had tried to draw nearer to them. He had shared their toil, ploughing the fields in spring, or taking up the sedentary trade of a cobbler in winter. What was far more difficult, he tried to share their simple beliefs, to be in unison with their unquestioning faith. Like the peasants, he had conformed to all the rites and practices of the Church, made the sign of the cross; he had gone to confession, attended mass. And now in his old age that spiritual bond was severed: he had been solemnly excommunicated from the communion of the Holy Orthodox Russian Church. Intellectuals might make light of the penalties of an effete power; but on the mind of the common people, for whose sympathy Tolstoy alone was craving, excommunication still produced something of the same effect which it once produced in the Middle Ages. To the pious and superstitious

peasant Tolstoy was under a curse. He was a dangerous man, whom one ought to avoid. Tolstoy felt the estrangement all the more because he continued to be in spirit with the Church of his people. On his last journey, wandering through the steppe, he knocked at the gates of a distant monastery, begging to be allowed to share the toil of the humblest monk.

Isolated from the class to which he belonged—isolated from the labouring masses—the Grand Old Man was no less isolated in his own family. His children did not share his convictions. His eldest son, Leo Lvovich, had written in the “Chopin Prelude” an impious attack on his father’s “Kreutzer Sonata.” The younger son, as a volunteer, took part in the very war which his father was denouncing. But most painful of all were the continued misunderstandings with the Countess. After thirty years of married life, husband and wife were drifting every day farther

apart. We have seen in a previous chapter how far-reaching and how lasting those misunderstandings were, and how they poisoned the home life of the Master. His wife, so far from helping him in his renunciations, was a perpetual obstacle. Was he only reflecting his own experience, and thinking of her who had been the devoted but self-willed companion and helpmate of his life, when he said that "woman is not man's equal in the highest qualities? She is not so self-sacrificing as man. Men will at times sacrifice their families for an idea. Women will not."

Since Tolstoy's death a pathetic document has come to light, which shows to what extremes Tolstoy was driven as far back as 1897.

"For a long time, my dear Sophia, I have been suffering from the contradiction between my life and my beliefs. I cannot compel you to change either your life or your habits, nor

have I myself hitherto been able to leave you ; for I thought that my leaving you might deprive the children, who are still very young, of that small amount of influence which I might still have over them, and that I might cause acute pain to all of you. But I cannot continue to live as I have been living these last sixteen years—either struggling against you, irritating you, and submitting myself to the influences and the comforts to which I am accustomed and which surround me. I have now resolved to do what I have wished to do for a long time—to depart, even as the Hindus, when they have reached the age of sixty, retire into the forest. Even as any old and pious man desires to consecrate the last years of his life to God, and not to jokes and puns, or gossiping or lawn tennis, even so I myself, having reached my seventieth year, I desire, with all the strength of my soul, peace and solitude, and if not a complete, at least not that

clamant discord between my mode of living and my conscience. If I had left openly, there would have been supplications, discussions. I would have given way, and perhaps I would not have executed my resolve, which must be executed. I pray you, therefore, to forget me if my action causes you pain, Sophia . . . Allow me to depart. Do not seek me, do not bear me any grudge, and do not blame me. The fact that I have left thee does not prove that I have grievances against thee. I know that thou couldst not see or think like myself. For that reason thou hast not been able to change thy life and to sacrifice to the ideal which thou didst not recognize. Therefore I do not blame thee. On the contrary, I remember with love and gratitude the thirty-five long years of our common life, especially of the first half of that life, when with the courage and devotion of thy maternal nature thou didst courageously bear what thou didst regard as

thy mission. Thou hast given to myself, to the world, what thou couldst give. Thou hast given much maternal love and made great sacrifices, but in the last period of our life, during the last fifteen years, our paths have separated. I cannot believe that I am the guilty one. I know that I have changed. It is not because of these, nor because of the world, but because I could not do otherwise. I cannot accuse thee for not having followed me, and I thank thee and shall always remember with love what thou hast given me. Farewell, my dear Sophia: I love thee."

This letter was not dispatched. The inevitable had happened. When it came to the final decision his courage failed him. It was only fourteen years later that, as a feeble old man of eighty-two, he carried out the heroic resolve of deserting his home. He died in the effort.



Distracting though the conflicts with the world must have been to Leo Nikolaievich, the conflicts with himself were more distracting still. To him the intellect and the heart were always at war, and, strong as was his will, the superhuman tasks which he had set himself were too much for him. He had the temperament of a hero, but it must be repeated he had not undergone the discipline of a mediæval saint. Human passions always remained strong in him. He never attained to that complete renunciation and surrender of self which he preached, and his life remained in flagrant contradiction with his teaching. Therefore the most uncompromising of moralists was doomed to a life of perpetual compromise ; the most sincere of men was doomed to a life of subtle evasions. He was opposed to railway travelling ; and he thought that he had sufficiently satisfied his scruples by tramping once or twice from Moscow to Toula. He dis-

approved of the use of money ; nor did he ever carry any with him, but he let his servant carry a purse in his place. He disapproved of private property in land, and gave up all his property rights, including the copyright of his books ; but he made them over to his wife. He disapproved of doctors; yet he was prevailed upon to have a resident doctor in his house, and he called him a "secretary." That Tolstoy should have contradicted himself on most vital points was inevitable when we consider the absolute and rigid nature of all his doctrines, and when we consider that it is impossible to live for one hour in this sublunary world without compromise. It is only in a monastery of Trappist monks or Carmelite nuns that the absolute rules supreme.

It is none the less deeply to be regretted that Tolstoy should have lent himself to a policy of practical casuistry which was repellent to his nature. He himself acutely

felt that it damaged his moral influence. Nobody more consistently held that example is the only efficient method of preaching. In the following letter he makes touching reference to his contradictions :—

“ Another question directly and involuntarily follows from this : ‘ Well, but you, Leo Nikolaievich, you preach—but what about practice ? ’

“ That is the most natural of questions ; people always put it to me, and always triumphantly shut my mouth with it. ‘ You preach, but how do you live ? ’ And I reply that I do not preach, and cannot preach, though I passionately desire to do so. I could only preach by deeds, and my deeds are bad. What I say is not a sermon, but only a refutation of a false understanding of the Christian teaching, and an explanation of its real meaning. Its meaning is not that we should, in its name, rearrange society by

violence : its purpose is to find the meaning of our life in this world. The performance of Christ's five commands gives that meaning. If you wish to be a Christian, you must fulfil those commands. If you do not wish to fulfil them, then don't talk about Christianity.

“‘But,’ people say to me, ‘if you consider that, apart from the fulfilment of the Christian teaching, there is no reasonable life, and if you love that reasonable life, why do you not fulfil the commands?’ I reply that I am to blame, and am horrid, and deserve contempt for not fulfilling them. But yet, not so much in justification as in explanation of my inconsistency, I say : ‘Look at my former life and at my present life, and you will see that I try to fulfil them. I do not fulfil one ten-thousandth part, it is true, and I am to blame for that ; but I do not fulfil it not because I do not wish to, but because I do not know how to. Teach me

how to escape from the nets of temptation that have ensnared me—help me—and I will fulfil them. But even without help I desire and hope to do so. Blame me—I do that myself—but blame *me*, and not the path I tread and show to those who ask me where, in my opinion, the road lies. If I know the road home, and go along it drunk, staggering from side to side, does that make the road along which I go a wrong one? If it be wrong, show me another; if I have lost my way and stagger, help me and support me in the right path, as I am ready to support you; and do not baffle me, and do not rejoice that I have gone astray, and do not delightedly exclaim: “Look at him! He says he is going home, yet he goes into the bog!” Do not rejoice at that, but help me and support me.

““For, indeed, you are not devils out of the bog, but are also men going home. See, I am alone, and I cannot wish to fall

into the bog. Help me. My heart breaks with despair that we have all gone astray; and when I struggle with all my strength, you, at every failure—instead of pitying yourselves and me—flurry me, and cry in ecstasy: “See, he is following us into the bog.”’

“So that is my relation to the teaching and to its practice. With all my might I try to practise it, and at every failure I not merely repent, but beg for help to enable me to perform it, and I gladly meet and listen to any one who, like myself, is seeking the road.”—(Aylmer Maude.)

By the supreme act of a man's life we may judge of his inmost soul. That unity and consistency which Tolstoy had not been able to maintain in his lifetime he showed in his death. He suddenly left Yasnaya Polyana on the 28th October (10th November) 1910, about five o'clock in the morning. Before

carrying out his final decision Tolstoy wrote the following farewell letter, which we must read in conjunction with the letter of 1897 :—

“ 4 o'clock. Morning of November 10, 1910.

“ My departure grieves you. I am sorry. But that I cannot act in another way, understand and believe. My position at home is becoming, and has become, unbearable. And besides, I cannot continue to live in the condition of luxury in which I have lived, and I am going to do now what old people of my age usually do—retire from worldly life, in order to spend in peace and quietness the remainder of their existence.

“ Please understand me, and do not follow me, even if you know where I am. Such a course would make your and my position yet worse, but would not change my resolution.

"I thank you for your forty-eight years' honest life with me, and beg you to pardon me all my shortcomings, as I from the depth of my soul pardon whatever may have appeared to me faulty in you. I advise you to resign yourself to the new condition created by my departure, and not to feel any resentment against me. If you wish to communicate with me, tell Sasha: she will know where I am and forward what is necessary. She cannot tell you where I am, as I took her promise not to divulge this to any one.

"LEO TOLSTOY.

"*P.S.*—I told Sasha to collect and send me my manuscripts and things."

In his flight he was accompanied by Dr. Makoviczy. His daughter Alexandra, whom he calls "his most faithful fellow-worker," was in the secret. The same day, at six o'clock in the evening, he reached the monastery of Optin, one of the most famous



shrines of Russia, where he had been several times on pilgrimage. There he passed the night, and on the morrow he wrote a long article on the death penalty. In the evening of the 29th October (11th November) he went to the monastery of Shamardin, where his only sister Maria was a nun. He dined with her, and expressed to her a desire to spend the last days of his life at Optin, acquitting himself of the humblest duties, but on condition that he should not be compelled to go to church. He slept at Shamardin, took a walk the next morning to the neighbouring village, where he thought of taking a room. He saw his sister again in the evening. At five o'clock his daughter Alexandra suddenly arrived. No doubt she came to warn him that his retreat was known, and that his family were in pursuit of him. The wanderers started off at once in the night. Tolstoy, Alexandra, and Dr. Makoviczy made for the station of Koselk,

probably with the intention of travelling to the southern provinces, perhaps to the colonies of the Doukhobors in the Caucasus. On his way Tolstoy was taken ill, and was transported to Astapovo. In that remote and unknown halt he died on the 20th November 1910, at six o'clock in the morning.\*

“Gently and patiently bearing the physical suffering he quietly ebbed away. In moments of consciousness and strength he conversed with those around him, was interested in letters, sometimes joked, and sometimes, impressed by the solemnity of the moment, uttered words of deep wisdom. His diary, kept till four days before his death, ends with the words :

“ ‘Also my plan, *Fais ce que dois, adv——*’ † (All is for the best, for others, and especially for myself.)

\* See Birukof's account in “Life of Tolstoy” (Cassell).

† *Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra.*

“During the last days he more than once repeated: ‘All is well . . . all is simple and well . . . well . . . yes, yes.’

“His death was so calm and peaceful that it actually had a tranquillizing effect on those around him. After successive hours of heavy respiration, the breathing grew suddenly light and easy. A few minutes later this light breathing also ceased. There was an interval of absolute silence—no efforts, no struggle. Then two scarcely audible, deep, long-drawn sighs. . . .

“On 22nd November the body was conveyed to the Saseka railway station, where it was met by a group of relations and near friends, and a large crowd, mostly peasants, students, and deputations from Moscow.

“The imposing simplicity of the funeral made a touching and exalting impression. The chanting of the *De Profundis* by the many thousands following the rude coffin, which was borne by peasants, heightened the

impression. At the head of the cortége were two peasants bearing an improvised banner of coarse linen, attached to two birch poles, with the inscription :—

THE MEMORY OF YOUR GOOD DEEDS WILL  
NOT DIE AMONGST US,

The Orphaned Peasants of Yasnaya Polyana."

Shallow journalists have considered the last step of the prophet as the act of a madman. Others have compared him to King Lear wandering on the moor in thunder and lightning. But to any one with a sense of the fitness of things, and of the grandeur of renunciation, the last act of Tolstoy's life possesses an impressive beauty. It is impossible to imagine a more sublime sacrifice than that of the Grand Old Man of eighty-two breaking away in one supreme effort from his surroundings and determined to carry out in death the ideals which he had

been unable to carry out in his mortal existence. It is impossible to conceive a more pathetic scene than that of this heretic and excommunicate begging the hospitality of unknown monks, and craving to be received into a Church which had rejected him. It was an appropriate, if tragic, conclusion to the noblest literary career of modern times.

THE END















